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Lively panel discussion at Frankfurt Book Fair on M'sia

FRANKFURT: A lively panel discussion ensued Friday at a forum of the ongoing Frankfurt International Book Fair, with the breezy title, "Malaysia: Navigating as Southeast Asia's Trade and Copyright Hub".

Malaysian exhibitors are making a strong pitch at the fair for their products and also trying to profile the country as Southeast Asia's publishing hub.

The Malaysian contingent comprises 17 exhibiting companies with six under the aegis of the Malaysian External Trade Corporation (Matrade).

The remaining eleven are on their own as trade visitors, publishers and agents at the world's largest book fair.

The discussion panel comprised Arndt Graf, professor for Southeast Asian studies at the Goethe University of Frankfurt, Mohd. Sabri Abdul Rahman, Malaysian Trade Commissioner in Frankfurt and Ariel Hakim Sani Rahmat, the managing director of PTS Millenia Pte. Ltd.

They had a question and answer session led by Adibah Omar, the assistant director in the secretariat at the National Book Council of Malaysia, Ministry of Education.

Graf reminded the forum that the Malaysian government has been investing heavily in education and creating highly-developed research infrastructure.

"People in Malaysia appreciate reading all kinds of literature from the scholarly to academic types," he said.

"There is strong interest (in Malaysia) for the study of humanities and social sciences among others. Many Malaysian authors are publishing in highly prestigious journals," he added.

Sabri highlighted Matrade's role in promoting the publishing business, and encouraged German and European publishers to seek the organisations guidance and assistance in finding suitable Malaysian partners.

Arief, who is also the honorary secretary of the Malaysian Book Publishers' Association, said that Malaysia's book industry is booming with 168 publishers and close to 16,000 titles published in 2009.

"The hub we envision for Malaysia is a meeting place for publishers, writers, literary agents, translators, and all professionals involved in the publishing business from Malaysia, Asean and globally," he explained in an interview with Bernama

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at the Malaysia pavilion of the book fair. He said that a trade and copyright centre, set up in conjunction with the Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair, from April 20-23 next year, will not only see participation of most Malaysian publishers but also many big players from the Asean region.

"It highlights the fast expanding regional translation market and strong framework for intellectual property rights, plus the convenience of brokering deals for multiple language versions of a single publication, all at once," he explained.

According to Arief, it was unfortunate that for Malaysia, the country has remained below the radar of global publishing agents.

"But this is going to change. In fact, it is already changing. There has been a dearth of international support for Malaysian publishers.

"However, demand for books and translation of books is expanding very rapidly. My advice to foreign publishers is, to not just look at Malaysia but the entire Southeast Asia region, which is a huge market," he added.

The Frankfurt Book Fair is from Oct 6-10.- Bernama