

Brazil's Minas Gerais Wants More Business with Arabs

Contributed by Geovana Pagel
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The governor of the state of Minas Gerais, Aécio Neves, stated that his state intends to "be in the lead when the matter is closer ties between the Arabs and Brazilians."

This statement was made during a meeting with the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Brazil, which is in the capital of the state so as to learn about its economic potential.

Minas Gerais is currently the fourth largest Brazilian exporter to the countries in the League of Arab States. In 2004, the state of Minas exported US\$ 336.3 million to the Arabs. The state only loses to São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná.

When comparing exports from January to April 2005 to the same period last year, exports from the state of Minas Gerais to the League grew 32.8%, from US\$ 85.3 million to US\$ 113.4 million. Saudi Arabia is the main buyer.

According to the president of the Federation of Industries of the State of Minas Gerais (Fiemg), Robson Braga de Andrade, who also participated in the meeting with the governor, the state has over 130 companies that export to the Arabs.

"The objective is to study forms to improve the existing trade relations. Taking a group of businessmen from Minas Gerais to the Arab countries may be a concrete way of improving ties," stated Andrade.

The state also imports from the Arab countries, being the ninth in the Brazilian ranking. Saudi Arabia is also in the first place among the countries that sell most to Minas Gerais.

To the state governor, the good existing trade relations are connected to the strong Arab presence in the state, mainly of people of Syrian and Lebanese origin. "They contribute very much to the development of Minas," stated Aécio Neves.

Other Talks

The delegation also had private meetings with the president of the Constitution and Justice Committee of the Legislative Assembly, Dalmo Ribeiro Silva and with the mayor of Belo Horizonte, Fernando Pimentel.

Both of them - and state governor Aécio Neves - were given an Arabic-Portuguese dictionary, a book telling the story of Palestine and a kafiyeh, a kind of scarf that is a symbol of the Palestinian people.

The group of Arab diplomats is headed by the Palestinian ambassador and Dean of the Council, Musa Amer Odeh, and includes the ambassadors of Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and a representative from Jordan.

Yesterday the Arabs also visited social project Valores de Minas, created and run by NGO Servas, in partnership with the state government. The Arab Ambassadors Council made a donation to the program, which also receives incentives from the private initiative.

The project seeks social inclusion through art and works with 500 youngsters between the ages of 13 and 24 years of age, from state-owned schools in the outskirts of the city. Six workshops are run, focussing on arts, circus, theatre, dance, music, citizenry and ethics.

At night, the ambassadors participated in a dinner at the Vila Árabe restaurant, offered by the honorary consul of Syria to Belo Horizonte, Lycio Cadar.

Meeting with Businessmen

There was a meeting yesterday between Arab diplomats and businessmen from Minas. Among the speakers were Robson Braga, from the Fiemg, Musa Odeh, Antônio Sarkis, the president of the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (CCAB), Michel Alaby, the CCAB secretary general and Wilson Brumer, the Economic Development secretary of the state of Minas Gerais.

The president and the secretary general of the CCAB presented the figures for trade between Brazil and the Arab countries and also between the state of Minas Gerais and the countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

In 2004, Brazil exported to the League of Arab States a total of US\$ 4.034 billion and imported US\$ 4.158 billion.

Sarkis and Alaby also discussed the potential to be developed between Minas and the Arab countries and the products that may integrate the trade basket between both regions.

The visit by the Ambassadors to the state of Minas Gerais ended yesterday. Before leaving the group planned to visit the installations of at least two companies: mining company Magnesita and Delp Engenharia Mecânica, which makes mining and ironworks equipment.

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