
Saudi Arabia Looks for Brazilian Land to Feed Saudi Population

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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Saudi Arabia's new ambassador to Brazilian capital Brasília, Mohamad Amin Ali Kurdi, wants to promote the flow of investments between his country and Brazil. This was among the main themes of the meeting the diplomat had August 22 with the board at the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, in São Paulo.

"Trade relations between both countries are currently centered on trade, and I would like to boost investment," said Kurdi. One of the ideas is to promote Saudi investment in Brazilian agribusiness, as the government wants to guarantee the food safety of the country.

Saudi Arabia has reduced its agricultural production with the objective of economizing water and has been seeking land in other countries on which to grow crops.

"The government decided to work on this strategy just two months before my arrival in Brazil, and began in the neighboring countries," said the ambassador, adding that he plans to organize a visit by the Saudi ministers of Trade and Agriculture to analyze the possibilities existing in Brazil.

Kurdi pointed out that his country is greatly interested in the sector and added that he has already visited the state of Tocantins, where agribusiness is currently living great expansion, to be able to analyze local opportunities.

"Brazil is leading agribusiness and is one of the countries which Saudi Arabia is eyeing, considering cooperation and investment," he added.

The president at the Arab Brazilian Chamber, Antonio Sarkis Jr., pointed out that the enterprise is developing a study on investment opportunities for foreigners in Brazil and in the Arab countries. The project will be coordinated by the organization's Foreign Trade vice president, Salim Schahin, and will count on the participation of the organization's secretary general, Michel Alaby.

"Trade has already reached a volume that justifies partnerships and investment in both regions," explained Sarkis. "We are going to show the opportunities present, the current legislation, the ease and the hardships," he pointed out.

The ambassador even proposed the idea of establishment of an agribusiness multinational with Saudi investment, Brazilian know-how and land and possible future participation by companies in other countries. As an example he mentioned Singapore, where he was ambassador before being posted in Brazil, and where there is great capital turned to the area of logistics.

Kurdi also added that there are investment opportunities for Brazilian companies in his country. He mentioned the "economic cities" that are currently under construction and that should mainly house activities counting on foreign capital. The diplomat spoke about the possibilities in the areas of industry, mining, services and also in the field of oil and gas, as state-owned company Saudi Aramco has plans to build new installations around the country.

"In the same way as we need Saudi investment in Brazil, Brazilian companies may also be successful in Saudi Arabia," explained Sarkis.

In this respect, the ambassador said that Sagia, the Saudi investment promotion agency, is studying the possibility of opening an office in Brazil. "There is already an initial agreement in this sense. Now, with my presence here, we are going to analyze the merit for further progress. I believe that this idea should gain in strength," he stated.

He wants Sagia to have deeper contact with its Brazilian counterpart, the Brazilian Export and Investment Promotion Agency (Apex-Brasil). Sarkis declared that the Apex is the main Arab Brazilian Chamber partner in the promotion of international events and added that the organization he heads may help in these relations.

The ambassador also suggested the establishment of a Brazil-Saudi Arabia Joint Business Council and a "Saudi-Brazilian Friendship Society" bringing together politicians, businessmen and other prominent personalities from both countries. The objective is to strengthen bilateral relations in different areas.

Kurdi also added the importance of an agreement to avoid dual income tax on business resulting from bilateral investment and of establishing brotherhood agreements between cities in both countries, like Brasília and Riyadh, the two capitals, and São Paulo and Jeddah, important business Centers in both. The Arab Brazilian Chamber has proposed to help in these initiatives.

The diplomat, aged 61, arrived in Brazil two months ago. Before coming to the country, he was the ambassador in Singapore, and has also had experience as a businessman and university professor.

The meeting at the Chamber's offices included two of the organization's vice presidents, Helmi Nasr (Foreign Relations) and Rubens Hannun (Marketing), former presidents Walid Yazigi and Orlando Sahan, director Bechara Ibrahim, and the Saudi embassy's public relations personnel Fahad Alessa and Wail Hababi.

Kurdi also met with representatives of Brazilian companies and organisations that do business in Saudi Arabia, like Sadia and Doux-Frangosul, slaughterhouses Bertin and Independência, as well as with Brazilian Association of Toiletries, Perfumes & Cosmetics Industries (Abihpec) and Tocantins government staff.

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