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Matrade willing to support US visa applications for M'sian chefs

NEW YORK: Malaysian restaurant owners in the United States (US) who face difficulties in getting well-trained chefs, can seek assistance from the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade).

New York-based Matrade Director Wan Latiff Wan Musa said the trade promotion agency would be willing to support employment visa applications for Malaysian chefs to the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on a case-by-case basis.

He was addressing a group of Malaysians operating restaurants and food catering outlets in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut at the Malaysian permanent mission building in New York, which also houses the Matrade representation,

Wednesday.

Mac Vasuram who runs a Malaysian restaurant in New Haven, Connecticut, said that he faced difficulties in finding a suitable chef for his restaurant because of "very strict employment visa regulations".

Many Malaysian restaurant owners privately expressed fears that rising unemployment in US, which has already crossed the 10 per cent mark, could lead to a stricter interpretation and application of visa regulations for foreign workers.

Matrade is aggressively pushing its "Malaysian Kitchen" programme which provides all kinds of assistance to Malaysian restaurants and, in effect, popularise Malaysian cuisine in US with the ultimate aim of

boosting Malaysia's exports of food products and ingredients to what is veritably the world's largest food market, measured by the per-capita spending by Americans on food.

Matrade will also provide all kinds of publicity to Malaysian restaurants and operate as a single-window for clearance of any financial assistance coming from Malaysia's EXIM Bank.

At the meeting, Matrade introduced a freshly appointed Public Relations (PR) agency to provide media and PR support for the Malaysian Kitchen programme.

The one-year ad hoc appointment of the PR agency called RF Binder will be reviewed after judging its performance in the current year. Wan Latiff said that he

found Malaysian restaurateurs were "excited" about the promotion. "Definitely, they will benefit directly from the programme," he said.

The PR agency was chosen in the course of a selection process by various committees, established both in Malaysia and New York, he said.

RF Binder was selected out of six US-based PR agencies that had responded to a tender publicised by Malaysia inviting PR agencies to express their interest in doing the PR work for the Malaysian Kitchen programme.

New York has the highest number of restaurants that serve Malaysian and a fusion of other Asian foods. But the numbers are also growing in New Jersey and Connecticut. — Bernama