

Panel on palm oil agrees to address Swiss concerns

THE STAR
ASIA NEWS NETWORK
KUALA LUMPUR

MALAYSIA'S Ministry of Primary Industries and the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research will form a special joint committee comprising experts from both nations to cooperate on issues relating to palm oil.

"The special expert committee will explore palm oil-related opportunities towards sustainability, bilateral trade, exchange of relevant scientific technologies and possible collaboration in downstream palm oil industry applications," the ministry said in a statement.

It said the effort was agreed upon during a meeting in Bern, Switzerland, between Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok and the Federal Councillor of the Swiss Confederation, Johann Schneider-Ammann.

The meeting was held at a crucial time since the upper house of the Swiss parliament had narrowly defeated a motion to restrict imports of palm oil and its applications into the country.

The Swiss motion was triggered by the country's concern that palm oil was produced unsustainably while contributing to deforestation.

Such misinformation propagated by a strong non-profit organisation's anti-palm oil campaign had succeeded in creating a major negative perception around palm oil, Malaysian officials said.

The ministers agreed that a special joint committee would go a long way towards addressing the many negative sentiments associated with palm oil in Switzerland and would also be an important tool to assure local Swiss rapeseed farmers that imported palm oil would not pose a threat to their livelihoods in the future.