

**Australia to raise people-smuggling issue with PM**  
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Prime Minister Najib Razak can expect to be pressed on people-smuggling issues and the progress of a free trade agreement during a three-day visit to Australia beginning today.

It is Najib's first visit since becoming prime minister and follows Prime Minister Julia Gillard's visit to Malaysia late last year.

Gillard will be hoping for Najib's support for her proposal to establish a regional processing centre for asylum-seekers in East Timor.

The plan, which lacks firm support even from the putative host, has not received any endorsements in South East Asia.

Malaysia is one conduit for asylum-seekers, mostly from the Middle East, who then enter Indonesia to board fishing vessels for their passage to Australia.

Gillard will also be pushing for the conclusion of a free trade agreement (FTA). Australia has FTAs with New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand and the United States and is negotiating deals with Malaysia, Japan and China.

In 2005 Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Najib's predecessor, became the first Malaysian leader to visit Australia in 21 years. Relations between the governments have improved since then, reflecting the close ties that the countries have always had.

More than 250,000 Malaysians have attended universities in Australia, with around 20,000 currently enrolled. More than 500,000 Australians visited Malaysia last year, mostly on holiday.

Trade was worth 10.6 billion US dollars last year, a 16 per cent increase on 2009. Australians have investments worth almost 9 billion US dollars in Malaysia while Malaysians have committed 4.3 billion US dollars to projects in Australia.

Najib is visiting in the company of Foreign Affairs Minister Anifah Aman, Higher Education Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin and Youth and Sports Minister Ahmad Shabery Cheek.

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