

Malaysia, Iran set to elevate bilateral ties, trade
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Malaysia hopes to elevate its bilateral trade relations with Iran in its post-sanctions era, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said today.

He said the sanctions on Iran resulted in total trade between Malaysia and Iran from January to June this year to drop to RM1.03 billion - only half of what it used to be.

"Therefore, our immediate objective, as agreed between President Dr Hassan Rouhani and I, will be to double trade (volume) within the shortest possible time and to go even beyond that in the subsequent years," Najib told a joint press conference with Rouhani, who is on a two-day official visit to Malaysia, in Putrajaya today.

Najib said the key to this objective was to enable business transactions to take place within the banking systems of the two countries.

"As you know, sanctions have imposed a very restrictive way of doing business and the two central banks will get together almost immediately to find our workable new mechanism to enable the private sector of both countries to conduct business in an efficient and effective way.

"We want this to happen and I'm confident a new mechanism will be found in the shortest possible time," he said.

On palm oil, Najib said the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) has decided to open its regional office in Tehran by the first quarter of next year.

He said Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Mah Siew Keong would lead a delegation to Iran soon.

On his meeting with the Iranian president, Najib said Malaysia was keen to participate in Iran's oil and gas, highway construction and automotive sectors.

"Iran has imported 12,000 Proton Saga (cars) in the past and we hope to participate in the automotive industry, particularly as supplier," he said.

On tourism, he said Malaysia and Iran hoped to increase the number of visitors between both countries.

"We see a somewhat decline in tourist (arrivals) from Iran and we hope the number will go up.

"We received about 65,000 Iranian visitors last year but it used to be double the figure and we hope that with efforts that will be taken, we will see more Iranians visiting Malaysia," he said.

'We have the same desired objectives'

Najib said both leaders also talked on the need to cooperate at the international level in various fora to ensure greatest stability and peace in the Muslim world.

"We can belong to different schools of taught, but we have the same desired objectives and goals. So, the closer we work together the better it will be for the Muslim world.

"During the two meetings, we had the opportunity to exchange views and opinion in an open manner on how both countries can elevate relations to a higher level.

"I am confident that his official visit will usher in a new period of enhance and deeper relations between Malaysia and Iran," he said.

Rouhani said Iran was ready to receive Malaysian companies in various areas, including the oil and gas, and petrochemical sectors, as well as to invest in the country.

"Of course, the private sector of both countries should get familiar with the full capability and capacity that exist in both countries and they should explore it," he said, citing cooperation in the food industry and halal issue.

In the night, Najib hosted an official dinner in honour of Rouhani at Seri Perdana in Putrajaya.

Present were Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, who is also the minister-in-attendance, Foreign Minister Anifah Aman and chief secretary to the government Ali Hamsa.

Najib greeted Rouhani upon arrival and ushered him to the Protocol Hall foyer to introduce to the president and the Iranian delegation some of the local fruits on display, including dokong, jack fruit, rambutan, mangosteen, durian and starfruit.

Rouhani arrived here today to begin his maiden official two-day visit to Malaysia since he assumed the presidency in 2013.

According to a statement from Wisma Putra, Rouhani's official visit was aimed at reaffirming and further strengthening the warm and close bilateral relations between Malaysia and Iran.

- *Bernama*

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