

PM: Malaysia committed to strengthening ties with the US
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Malaysia will remain committed to strengthening economic and trade ties with the United States and other countries involved in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), irrespective of whether the pact takes off.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said while countries involved in the TPPA were aware that president-elect Donald Trump was not in favour of proceeding with the agreement, it would be premature to make any conclusion before he assumed office.

In its current guise, the TPPA cannot come into force without the United States' involvement, Najib said when asked how Malaysia would react if the United States failed to ratify the TPPA and if Malaysia would agree for a renegotiation.

"As such, it is not a question of whether or not Malaysia - or any other country for that matter - could still proceed with its ratification.

"Whether TPPA proceeds or not, we remain committed to strengthening our economic and trade ties with the US and the other countries involved," Najib, who is also finance minister, said in a written interview with *Nikkei Asian Review* (NAR), ahead of his three-day working visit to Japan, beginning today.

This visit is on the invitation of his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe.

On Malaysia's relations with China, especially with the recent deepening of economic and defence links, he said bilateral ties have reached a new level and one can expect the trend to continue.

"This is not surprising, given that China is our largest trading partner and accounts for over 15 percent of trade outside our borders," Najib said.

However, Malaysia's relations with any particular country would not be at the expense of its association with other nations.

"And, as far as the United States is concerned, this is a relationship we place great importance on. Indeed, this is reflected by the elevation of our bilateral relationship to a comprehensive partnership in 2014," he said to NAR when asked if Malaysia would reconsider its relations with the United States.

"We already cooperate on a range of areas including the economy, trade, security and defence - and hope to further enhance our relations under president-elect Trump," said Najib.

High-speed rail line

Touching on the high-speed rail line connecting Kuala Lumpur to Singapore, the prime minister said Malaysia was tremendously excited about it and was committed to an objective, transparent and competitive selection process in the form of a public tender to find the best railway system.

The planned high-speed rail (HSR) service between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will be the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken by the country.

Putrajaya and Singapore are set to ink a legally binding bilateral agreement on Dec 5 for the development of the HSR, which is set to cut travelling time between Kuala Lumpur and the island state to just 90 minutes.

"The *shinkansen* (Japan's high-speed train) system's long record of safety, reliability and excellence ensures that it will be a competitive player in the bidding process," Najib said.

On his visit to Japan, Najib said besides strengthening bilateral ties, he was also committed to increasing trade and investment flows specifically in innovation and cutting-edge technology, high-tech skills, services development and renewable energy.

- *Bernama*