



**PM to warm India-M'sia ties during winter visit**  
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India-Malaysia relations can be better and warmer if time-tested recipes are slightly altered and whipped up to suit current tastes, say many a keen observer of relations between the two countries.

So, when Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak visits India beginning Tuesday, he might need to use a fresh concoction to spice up relations between "two old friends" before diplomatic fatigue sets in, they say.

For over two decades or so, India-Malaysia watchers feel that India had blipped mildly on Malaysia's radar as they claim that Malaysians might have overlooked their old Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) ally as they calibrated their focus on the "Look East" policy from the 1980s.

The result was that India got less attention as most Malaysian key decision-makers had a less than favourable view of that country's shielded economy then.

But today, it is a different ball game altogether. India has ascended from its touristy type of magazine images of the land of "sadhus" (holy men) and soothsayers.

With a population of 1.2 billion, it is now telling the rest of the world of rainbow-coloured stories, like its US\$1.2 trillion (RM4.0 trillion) economy is Asia's third largest, only rivalled by China and Japan.

Its sizzling economy, growing at about seven per cent annually, is propelled by a 300-million strong middle-class of affluent Indians, larger than even the entire American population put together.

India's foreign reserves currently stand at US\$280 billion (RM935 billion) and last year it pulled in a staggering worth of US\$18 billion (RM60 billion) in foreign investments even as money supply dried up in international markets.

**Right strategy needed**

In the last three decades, India has progressed since its economy was liberalised. The kind of activities that had taken place in India since then is certainly remarkable.

For example, the India Space and Research Organisation (ISRO) had launched 53 satellites and Indian scientists are even developing artificial human hearts based on cockroach breathing techniques!

India is definitely a rising economic supremo with a large scientific reservoir and it would definitely be of strategic importance for a nation like Malaysia to have close ties with the Indians.

Observers say that Najib can profit from this trip with the right strategy.

Having a broad-based template, with pragmatic sustainable investment policies coupled with new geopolitical strategy with India, is the need of the hour, especially when the region's geopolitical and economic contours frequently change and overlap.

The India-Malaysia watchers also say that Najib needs to remove policies that are vague or draw ire among Indians and its influential and free Indian media.

They add that the Malaysian leader also needs to embark on diplomatic initiatives to convince the Indian political elite that Malaysia is a serious player, like its neighbour Singapore, the second largest investor in the Indian economy last year with investments of US\$3.4 billion (RM11.35 billion).

India's cultural and political tempo is on a different plateau today. With its growing economic might, it is charting a new destiny in the region as it tries to revive its influence.

Engaging India more deeply is surely to Malaysia's economic and security advantage, but there needs to be improved diplomatic housekeeping as well to complete the recipe, the observers say.

### **Visit to Tamil Nadu**

When Najib travels to Tamil Nadu in southern India, he has to win over hard-core Tamil leaders, who may have blood ties and strong cultural links with Malaysians of Indian descent.

Another area where Najib can score is bringing to book unscrupulous labour recruiters and employers who had given Indian migrant workers a raw deal.

The observers say that Najib should be able to triumph in both northern and southern India, given his pragmatic perspective or world view on many issues and his ability to think on his feet.

And the prime minister's genial personality should certainly defrost the iciest of India's winters and warm the hearts of his hosts to break new ground for stronger bilateral ties, they hasten to add.

- *Bernama*

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