

Packed Australian Itinerary For Najib
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CANBERRA -- High-profile meetings and gatherings, including with Australian counterpart Julia Gillard, are on the cards as Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak flies in here Wednesday to begin a three-day official visit to Australia as both countries aim to forge better ties.

The visit, at the invitation of Gillard to reciprocate her official visit to Malaysia last year, will be Najib's first Down Under since taking office as prime minister.

"This visit will be good for Malaysia-Australia relations. It will definitely boost the relationship further," said Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia Salman Ahmad.

Malaysia and Australia share longstanding vibrant relations in a broad range of areas covering trade and investment, education and human capital development, security, defence and sports.

Najib, who will be accompanied by wife, Rosmah Mansor, three Cabinet ministers namely Foreign Minister Anifah Aman, Higher Education Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin and Youth and Sports Minister Ahmad Shabery Cheek, as well as senior officials during the visit, will be accorded an official welcoming ceremony at the Parliament House forecourt here on Thursday.

Najib and Gillard are also scheduled to engage in restricted and bilateral meetings.

They are also scheduled to hold a joint press conference, prior to an official luncheon hosted by Gillard.

Details and agenda of the meetings involving the two leaders have yet to be disclosed.

During Gillard's two-day visit to Malaysia, beginning Oct 31 last year, Malaysia and Australia had, among others, hoped to strike a free trade agreement by this year and pledged commitment to work together on issues involving smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crimes.

His packed itinerary in Canberra also includes meeting Australian opposition leader Tony Abbott, calling on Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia Quentin Bryce and attending a wreath-laying ceremony at the Australian War Memorial.

Najib is also scheduled to witness government-to-government memorandum of understanding signing ceremonies in areas of education and sports.

Rosmah has a separate programme in Canberra where she is scheduled to visit North Ainslie Primary School.

Later in the day on Thursday, Najib and delegation would travel to Melbourne to attend a dinner hosted by Premier of Victoria Ted Baillieu.

In the course of the visit, Najib will be conferred an Honorary Doctorate from the renowned

Monash University in Melbourne.

Monash University opened a campus in Malaysia, which is located in Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya, in 1998 to become the first foreign university campus in Malaysia.

Prior to the conferment, Najib will visit Melbourne University and meet Malaysian students there and join the congregation for Friday prayers at the university's Sports Centre Building.

In Melbourne, Najib is also scheduled to attend a roundtable discussion with Australian captains of industry.

According to a Wisma Putra statement, total trade between Malaysia and Australia grew by 16.1 per cent last year to reach US\$10.63 billion, from US\$8.36 billion in 2009.

Australia has invested US\$6.91 billion in Malaysia over the last 30 years.

Malaysia, too, has been a keen investor in Australia, investing US\$4.3 billion between 2007 and last year.

Salman said Australia was the most popular destination for tertiary education among Malaysians.

Currently, there are over 20,000 Malaysian students studying in Australia, and most of them or about 6,000, were in the state of Victoria, he said.

(Bernama)

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