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Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	28/3/2012

Najib's visit to see firmer ties with Myanmar

NST-28/3/2012

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NAYPYIDAW: Datuk Seri Najib Razak arrives here today for a two-day official visit, his first as prime minister.

Najib, accompanied by wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, will land at the impressive Naypyidaw international airport before the day's programme kicks in, the highlight of which will be the meeting between the prime minister and President of Myanmar, Thein Sein.

The airport, the sprawl of resort-hotels in the city and the overall

ambition demonstrated a certain sense of pride of a nation ready to showcase its potential and receive visitors, Malaysian officials said.

They spoke of a renewed desire on the part of Myanmar to pursue reform and progress, also highlighted by Sunday's series of 48 by-elections to fill up seats vacated by ministers and members of the nominally civilian administration which came into office a year ago in March.

Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy Party are contesting.

"It is a country in transition (billed as) the new hot destination for businesses," which was how the Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar, Dr Ahmad Faisal Muhammad, summed up the mood, in his briefing to the Malaysian media yesterday.

Changes have been visible in the past few months with Yangon, the hyperactive former capital and other cities like Mandalay, witnessing a rush of investors sensing varied potential with hotels fully booked and flights full.

The raft of positive pronoun-

ments — the latest has been the April 1 implementation of a managed currency-exchange float — had gone a long way towards inspiring confidence and optimism, said Ahmad Faisal.

Malaysia ranks seventh in overall investment with Petronas the most recognisable presence. There are some 200 Malaysian businessmen here and 257,583 Myanmar workers in Malaysia.

The Malaysian delegation is 100-member strong plus a 50-member business delegation.

Specifically on the pace of re-

forms, Malaysia has expressed support and the official visit is seen as a means of strengthening relations.

Malaysia had a prominent role in bringing Myanmar into Asean at the KL Summit in 1997, followed seven years later with a visit to Myanmar by the then prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Ministers in the delegation are Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam (human resources), Datuk Seri Anifah Aman (foreign affairs), Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein (home), and Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek (youth and sports).