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Development will come with peace, says Najib

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SAFETY: Better security in southern Philippines will attract investors, says PM

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A PEACEFUL southern Philippines will pave the way for robust economic development in the area, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday.

He said this about the Philippines' readiness to offer land for oil palm plantations to interested parties.

For this to happen, Najib said, there was a need to establish peace in southern Philippines to pull in new investments.

"With better security, Malaysia's investments in the Philippines can increase. New investments are very much needed in the southern Philippines as the people there have long been left behind in terms of development," he said after a bilateral meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

On another matter, Najib has proposed to Duterte to find a practical solution to enable the setting up of Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) regional office in Kota Kinabalu.

However, Najib said, legal issues and the Philippines' claim to Sabah were barriers.

"I have suggested that Duterte put

aside the Sabah claim issue and find a practical approach to enable the establishment of the regional office.

"Duterte has agreed with this recommendation and instructed his officers to find a way to set up the office in Kota Kinabalu."

BIMP-EAGA was launched in Davao City, the Philippines, on March 24, 1994, covering Brunei; the provinces of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, West Papua and Papua in Indonesia; Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan in Malaysia; and, Mindanao and Palawan in the Philippines.

On whether Malaysia's economic focus had moved to China from the United States, Najib said Malaysia considered the US a strong ally in fighting extremism and terrorism, and a strong economic partner.

He said his visit to China did not mean Malaysia's relationship with the US was less important.

"Our (Malaysia's) economic partnership with the US will continue."

Najib said China was Malaysia's largest trading partner, and it was timely for Malaysia to look at more economic opportunities.

Najib's third official visit to China last week had made history, with the signing of 14 agreements worth RM143.64 billion and the appointment of Internet tycoon Jack Ma as the government's digital economy adviser.