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Doubling trade volume with Iran

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SANCTIONS-FREE:
Nations will devise new mechanism to boost business dealings, says Najib

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MALAYSIA hopes to elevate bilateral trade relations with Iran in the latter's post-sanctions era.

The sanctions on Iran resulted in total trade between Malaysia and Iran from January to June to drop to RM1.03 billion, which is half of what it used to be, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

He said the immediate objective agreed with Iranian President Dr Hassan Rouhani was to double the trade volume in the shortest possible time.

"As you know, the sanctions (on Iran) have imposed very restricted ways to do business.

"I am confident a new mechanism will be found in the shortest time-frame," Najib said in a joint press conference with Rouhani, who is on a two-day official visit here.

Najib said the key to this objective was to allow business transactions to take place within the two countries' banking system.

He announced that the two countries' central banks would meet to identify a new mechanism that allowed business to be conducted efficiently and effectively.

"We want this to happen, and I'm confident a new mechanism will be found in the shortest possible time."

Najib said Rouhani's timely visit allowed both nations to look at en-

hancing bilateral ties, especially in economy and business.

He said the sanctions on Iran had impacted trade between both countries significantly.

He announced Malaysia's decision to open a Malaysia Palm Oil Board office in Teheran in the first quarter of next year.

He said Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Mah Siew Keong would lead a delegation to Iran soon.

"We have talked about palm oil (in the restricted bilateral meeting), which is an important commodity for Malaysia, with more than half a million smallholders depending on the sector.

"Iran is a big importer of Malaysia's palm oil. There are some issues we have to sort out, but we are confident that we have a strong scientific basis to show that palm oil is safe and healthy, providing a lot positive nutritional attributes."

Najib expressed his wish to see Malaysia tapping into Iran's automotive industry.

"Iran has imported 12,000 Proton Saga in the past, and we hope to participate in the automotive industry (in Iran), particularly as supplier."

On tourism, he said Malaysia and Iran hoped to increase the number of visitors between both countries.

"We see a somewhat decline in tourist (arrivals) from Iran, and we hope the number will go up.

"We received about 65,000 Iranian visitors last year, but it used to be double the figure, and we hope with efforts that will be taken, we will see more Iranians visiting Malaysia."

Najib said Malaysia was keen to participate in Iran's oil and gas industry and highway construction.

"During the two meetings, we had the opportunity to exchange views and opinions in an open manner on how both countries can elevate re-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak welcoming Iranian President Dr Hassan Rouhani at Perdana Putra in Putrajaya yesterday. Bernama pic

lations to a higher level.

"I am confident that his official visit will usher in a new period of enhanced and deeper relations between Malaysia and Iran."

Rouhani echoed Najib's enthusiasm to boost ties between the two countries, and shared Iran's foreign policy, stressing on the great importance of its relations with Asean countries, including Malaysia.

He said Iran was ready to receive Malaysian companies in various sectors, including the oil and gas and petrochemical sectors, as well as to invest in the country.

"Today (yesterday), in our private bilateral interaction, we have raised various matters, especially in terms of trade and economy.

"Of course, the private sector of both countries should get familiar

with the full capability and capacity that exist in both countries, and they should explore it," he said, citing cooperation in the food industry and halal sector.

He said he shared the same views with Najib that 2016 would be the year to motivate and expedite movements between both countries to expand bilateral relations in science, culture and politics.