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# Najib: China ties stay strong

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## There will be no compromise on territorial dispute, says PM

MALAYSIA'S bilateral relations with China remain strong although both countries have overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea, says Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

He said Malaysia's ties with China, especially in the areas of defence, economy and trade, should be strengthened for the mutual benefit of both countries, he said in response to a question by Datuk Hasan Arifin (BN-Rompin).

Hasan had asked about Malaysia's stance on China's occupation of the Spratly Islands in the multi-nation claim to the South China Sea, a vital waterway through which some US\$5 trillion (RM19.87 trillion) of ship-borne traffic passes each year.

China has been under fire from

four Asean nations for its aggressive attempts at taking control of the inhabitable islands said to be rich in natural resources.

On the possibility of other nations misinterpreting the close relations between Malaysia and China, Najib said diplomatic and economic relations were necessary as China was well on its way to becoming the world's largest economy by 2050.

"If we need a market to export our goods and commodities, gain investment and tourism opportunities, then China will be the biggest source.

"It is not a question of us being too dependent on China, it is a fact that China is a rapidly growing economy," he added.

Najib said there would be no compromise with the growing economic powerhouse in the face of the South China Sea dispute.

"Malaysia's stance is clear and consistent, and we will continue to adopt a non-confrontational approach to this issue," he said.

"All nations must ensure peace and stability, and any action that can threaten this and cause tension, fear and suspicion, or is provocative in nature, should be avoided.

"Even though we have strong economic relations with China, we still hold on to the principle of defending our rightful sovereignty."

In a reply to Nurul Izzah Anwar (PKR-Lembah Pantai) about the possibility of China breaching

Malaysian waters in its attempts to strengthen its claim, Najib stressed that the country's sovereignty was paramount.

Datuk Seri Mohd Azmin Ali (PKR-Gombak) then suggested introducing a "peace zone" in the South China Sea, similar to the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (Zopfan).

To this, Najib said the spirit of Zopfan was still the "base factor" in attempts to resolve the longstanding dispute.

Signed by Asean member states in 1971, Zopfan was drawn up to keep South-East Asia free from interference by outside powers and to broaden the areas of cooperation.