

Newspaper	NEW STRAITS TIMES
Date	27 SEPTEMBER 2016

Economy, Syria top PM's agenda

NST-27/9/2016

VERY GOOD TIES:

German investors are in for the long term, says ambassador to Malaysia



Reporting from Berlin

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak arrived here yesterday to kick off his three-day official visit to Germany with bilateral economic ties, Syria and security issues topping his discussions with German Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel.

Najib, making his first official visit as prime minister to Europe's biggest economy, was accompa-

nied by his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Mah Siew Keong.

He will be accorded full military honours at the welcoming ceremony at the Federal Chancellery here — the seat of the German government — today before attending a working lunch with Merkel.

They will meet the press afterwards.

Malaysia-German ties have been essentially about trade and economic cooperation, the cornerstone of Malaysia's diplomacy. Both nations enjoy very good political and economic relations.

At the height of the Flight MH17 tragedy in July 2014, Merkel telephoned Najib to express her condolences over the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) aircraft crash in Ukraine.

During the conversation, Merkel also told Najib that Germany was prepared to assist Malaysia in whatever way possible.

Merkel and Najib met four months later at the Asia-Europe summit in Milan, where during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the summit, both leaders extended an invitation to visit each other's capital.

The invitation was renewed a year later when both leaders met on the sidelines of the November 2015 G-20 Summit in the Turkish resort city of Antalya. The usually economic- and trade-heavy agenda at the summit of world leaders was instead centred on the Syrian and the refugee crises and security following the terror attacks in Paris.

Malaysian and German diplomats said while the visit was strictly about trade and investments, they would not rule out the possibility of Merkel raising other issues, such as corporate governance and the rule of law in Malaysia.

Germany has a reputation as a European and global economic powerhouse. German investors say they also expect continued political stability and policy certainty in Malaysia in order to win their business confidence.

"German investors are long-term

investors," Holger Michael, Germany's ambassador to Malaysia, told Bernama. "They take into account long-term perspectives in making investment decisions."

But he said they wanted certainty in terms of governance standards, rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.

There are more than 400 German companies in Malaysia, with some 220 of them having production facilities. Germany is also the biggest EU investor in Malaysia, with RM35 billion worth of investments.

Bilateral trade, however, is in Germany's favour, with Malaysia importing heavy machinery, cars and car parts. BMW, Audi, Porsche, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen are all top German brands.

Besides direct economic exchanges, Malaysia has also benefited from German technical and vocational cooperation programmes. The German-Malaysia Institute, which began in 1991, is one good example.

Merkel, meanwhile, is facing increasing political pressure at home over her decision to open up her country to refugees, resulting in the inflow of 1.1 million last year alone.

Najib would reiterate at his meeting with Merkel that Malaysia has agreed to accept 3,000 Syrian migrants from last year to help alleviate the refugee crisis.

He had said Muslim countries were partly responsible for ensuring the well-being of the marginalised Syrians fleeing their country in massive numbers, causing social and economic stresses in Europe.

Some four million Syrian refugees fled into neighbouring countries over the last four years, and slipped

INFOGRAPHIC: NST

Factbox

- Germany is the largest EU investor in Malaysia
- Germany is Malaysia's 12th largest trading partner
- Total bilateral trade was US\$10.3b in 2015
- Total approved German investments in Malaysia amount to US\$11.4b, creating over 63,000 jobs
- Malaysia is Germany's second biggest trading partner in ASEAN
- There are 1,500 Malaysians in Germany, including 600 students
- About 150,000 German tourists visit Malaysia in a year
- There are no direct flights between Malaysia and Germany, after both MAS and Lufthansa discontinued the service

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Johor Baru	5:37	6:53	12:58	4:04	7:00	8:09
Kuantan	5:41	6:56	1:01	4:08	7:03	8:12
Ipoh	5:49	7:02	1:10	4:19	7:11	8:20

inexorably into poverty.

In terms of security cooperation, Michael said Germany and Malaysia could begin exchanging information and sharing intelligence in de-radicalisation efforts and in dealing with the threats of the Islamic State.