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STRATEGIC RELATIONS

# NAJIB: SAUDI KING'S VISIT PROVED CRITICS WRONG

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It dispels false accusations about economy, EPF, civil servants' salary, says PM

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**S**AUDI Arabia's King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud's state visit to Malaysia last month puts an end to false accusations by irresponsible parties.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said King Salman's visit was significant in all aspects.

He said Malaysia was the first country in Southeast Asia that His Majesty chose to visit since ascending the throne in 2015.

"There are those who have tried to nullify us, by calling us a failed state, saying the economy is unstable, resulting in wrong information being given to Saudi Arabia and Saudi Aramco.

"There was also talk that the Employees Provident Fund is bankrupt and that there is no money to pay civil servants.

"King Salman's visit dispels all these false accusations by irresponsible parties," he said at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

Najib (BN-Pekan) was responding to a supplementary question by Datuk Dr Shamsul Anuar Nasarah (BN-Lenggong), who asked about the significance of King Salman's visit.

Earlier, Najib had said King Salman's visit had hugely impacted the country, especially in building closer strategic relations, better economic ties and a more meaningful ummah bond.

Najib said in terms of the economy, seven memoranda of understanding were inked between the Malaysian and Saudi Arabian pri-

vate sectors involving commercial potential and cross-border investments valued at RM9.75 billion.

"The agreements involved the energy, health, construction, education and halal sectors, as well as the small- and medium-sized industries.

"The highlight of the visit was the equity investment involving Petronas and Saudi Aramco for the latter's participation in Petronas's RAPID (Refinery and Petrochemical Integrated Development) project in Pengerang.

"The investment, totalling RM31 billion, is the largest yet by a Saudi company in Malaysia."

He said King Salman had expressed his full support for the setting up of the King Salman Centre for International Peace.

"For this purpose, cooperation in defence will continue to be strengthened, specifically in tackling violent and extremist ideology to ensure it does not spread and is curtailed by both countries."

He said the haj quota for Malaysians was also discussed during King Salman's visit.

He said the government had applied to the Saudi government to increase the quota.

"Alhamdulillah, as a result of the discussion, His Majesty consented to increase the quota from 27,900 to 30,200 pilgrims.

"King Salman will also consider Malaysia's application to rent land to build a residential complex for Malaysian pilgrims."

Najib said King Salman's visit was historic and showed His Majesty's confidence in Malaysia's political and economic stability.

He said the visit had boosted bilateral ties to the highest level.

To a supplementary question by Datuk Takiyuddin Hassan (Pas-Kota Baru) on whether Malaysia was prepared to cooperate with Saudi Arabia in other areas, such as reducing crime, Najib said any cooperation was possible, including crime reduction.