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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Saudi Arabia's King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud in Putrajaya yesterday. With them are Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman (second from right), Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein (right), Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance Salih Abdulaziz Al-Ash-Shaikh (second from left), and Saudi Minister of State and Council of Ministers member Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al-Assaf (left). BERNAMA PIC

KING SALMAN'S VISIT

# MALAYSIA-SAUDI TIES 'BEST EVER' IN HISTORY

NST- 28/2/2017

Countries sign MoUs that reaffirm mutual trust, respect

PUTRAJAYA

**M**ALAYSIA and Saudi Arabia yesterday sealed a series of landmark deals as the leaders of both nations hailed long-standing ties as the "best ever" in history.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, after talks with Saudi Arabia's King Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud, said the deals reaffirmed the two countries' partnership in crucial sectors and strengthened a "brotherhood" built on mutual trust and respect.

King Salman, on the second day of his four-day state visit to Malaysia, held talks with Najib at the prime minister's official residence, Seri Perdana, here.

The countries yesterday signed four memoranda of understanding

(MoUs), covering cooperation in the fields of the economy, labour and human resources, science and education, and cooperation between its two national news agencies, Bernama and the Saudi Press Agency.

Malaysia also requested that the annual quota for its haj pilgrims be raised to 30,000, which received a positive response from King Salman.

Saudi Arabia also agreed to increase the number of scholarships for Malaysian students to study in the kingdom next year.

Both countries agreed in principle to forge stronger military and security cooperation to combat terrorism.

Another key deal will see Saudi Arabian Oil Co (Saudi Aramco) and Petroleum Nasional Bhd (Petronas) inking a US\$7 billion landmark deal today to build and manage an oil refinery plant in Pengerang, Johor, under the Refinery and Petrochemical Integrated Development (Rapid) project.

Elaborating on the MoUs, Najib said both countries wanted to en-

hance investment and trade, with hopes for Malaysia to be involved in more projects in Saudi Arabia.

"Malaysia is keen to send more of our nurses there (Saudi Arabia) and enhance the cooperation between universities in both countries, including in research and development."

He said King Salman responded positively to Malaysia's request for the annual quota for its haj pilgrims to be raised to 30,000.

"For King Salman, as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the management of haj pilgrims is a very important matter," said Najib, adding that King Salman had informed that he would look into the request.

This year, the haj quota for Malaysian pilgrims has been restored to 27,900. In 2013, the quota had been reduced to 22,230.