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A picture that tells a thousand words – warmer ties with Saudi

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DURING a short drive to the banquet hall of Seri Perdana from where the Protocol Room is located, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak made a request to King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud for a selfie.

To his surprise and delight, the Saudi Arabian Ruler agreed. The Prime Minister posted the photograph on Twitter and it went viral. It had 6,000 likes and more than 15,000 retweets as of press time.

Not many people can claim to have the honour of having a photograph taken with the Saudi Ruler, let alone a selfie.

The photograph speaks volumes, not only of the good relations between King Salman and Najib, but also between Riyadh and Putrajaya.

It came as a surprise – and honour – that King Salman decided to accept Malaysia's invitation for a visit as soon as it was extended.

The Prime Minister's excitement over the visit was evident – his Facebook and Twitter accounts were constantly updated with photographs, statements and livestreams.

To make the royal visitor feel at home, Najib made sure that Western food was served during the luncheon with King Salman on Monday,

upon knowing that the Ruler enjoys the cuisine.

Even the air-conditioning was adjusted to a temperature befitting their climate, much to everyone's surprise as it was assumed the guests would want the rooms to be cool.

Seri Perdana, which usually smells fresh and floral, had an "Arab scent" that day – a move to make the esteemed guest feel at home.

Najib said King Salman's visit is not only historic but has put ties between both countries on an upward trajectory.

He couldn't be more right.

For one, King Salman brought along a strong delegation of 600 people, which also included ministers and business leaders who are here to help strengthen ties at different levels.

Then, there was the signing of a major joint-venture deal between Saudi's state-owned company Aramco and Petronas, which promises an investment worth US\$7bil (RM30bil).

By any standard, that's a feat and is a vote of confidence for the Malaysian economy.

It is learnt that the Prime Minister had specifically assigned minister in charge of the Economic Planning Unit Datuk Seri Abdul Rahman

Dahlan to talk to Aramco officials. And after a month of what Najib described as an "intense negotiation", the deal was signed yesterday.

Saudi Arabia has also agreed to consider Malaysia's request to increase the number of its Haj pilgrims, even after the number rose to 30,000 for this year.

"Although the request is still being considered, for it to reach that stage reflects the nature of relationship that we have with Saudi Arabia," said an official.

Another indicator of the good relations is that the Ruler has consented to the setting up of the King Salman Centre for Global Peace in support of Malaysia's effort to stamp out the narrative brought by radicals and extremists.

King Salman, like Najib, wants the world to know the "authentic Islam" which promotes peace and tolerance and not violence and terror.

"The goodwill between the Ruler and Prime Minister is evident. You can see their chemistry," observed International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed.

To King Salman and his entourage who will leave today, we wish you *jazakumullahu khairan* (thank you very much) and *illal liqa'* (farewell).



Cordial meeting: Najib welcoming King Salman to Seri Perdana in Putrajaya. — Bernama