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# PM seeks to strengthen ties with India

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Over RM23bil in projects expected to be signed during Najib's visit beginning today

THE land of the Taj Mahal and the sacred Ganges River is the next big stage for Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as he arrives here to widen engagement with a country that is predicted to be the world's third most powerful economy by 2030.

It will be the Prime Minister's third visit to India since taking office in 2009, which underscores his deep personal commitment to strengthen ties with one of Malaysia's closest allies.

From just US\$2bil-US\$3bil (RM8.8bil-RM13.2bil) in the 1990s, bilateral trade grew to about US\$12bil (RM52.8bil) last year.

In no small measure, Najib's efforts elevated the bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership in 2010. This was followed by the Malaysia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement in 2011 to stimulate more growth.

"From what used to be a work-in-progress, it is now a relationship which is fast progressing," said a senior Indian foreign

**PAUL GABRIEL**  
in India

newsdesk@thestar.com.my



ministry official.

A total of US\$5.3bil (RM23.32bil) worth of project deals are expected to be inked during the PM's visit beginning here today.

Prominent will be the signing of seven bids worth US\$1.2bil-US\$1.4bil (RM5.28bil-RM6.16bil) by Malaysia's Construction Industry Development Board for Rajasthan state's highways.

Malaysia is also setting up a 104ha technology park in Amravati and entering an MoU with Bengaluru for a fibre optic and smart city project worth US\$300mil (RM8.13bil).

Talks will be held on the laying of railway tracks by IRCON International for the Serendah-Klang-Seremban line.

An interesting highlight will be the setting up of an Ayurveda Chair in Malaysia for Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman to offer a degree course in ayurveda.

Najib has again chosen to visit the Tamil heartland here, as he did in 2010 during his first state visit.

About 85% of the 2.7 million Indians in Malaysia originate from the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

"The PM's visit to India shows the importance he places on the contributions of Malaysian Indians to our national development," said MIC president and Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam, who is a member of Najib's delegation.

In Chennai, Najib will meet acting governor of Tamil Nadu Vidhyasagar Rao and Tamil Nadu chief minister Edappadi Palaniswamy, and hold a dialogue with the Malaysian com-

munity there.

In New Delhi, Najib will meet Indian president Pranab Mukherjee and hold talks with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

Issues on the table include trade and investment, infrastructure projects, defence cooperation, air services arrangements, tourism and culture relations and international cooperation.

Najib will deliver a keynote address at an India-Malaysia Business Summit and also attend an India-Malaysia CEO Forum.

Some 80 business leaders from Malaysia and 200 from India are attending.

Najib will be accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor and several ministers including Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz and Works Minister Datuk Seri Fadillah Yusof.