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'MALAYSIA SEEN AS SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY'

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We are not seen as a nation that begs and kneels, but one that is sovereign, says prime minister

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MALAYSIA has grown by leaps and bounds since its humble beginnings 54 years ago.

We grew from a lesser-known agriculture nation to a successful one recognised by many world leaders, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

He said this was evident from the reception he received from world leaders, including United States President Donald Trump during his just concluded working visit to the country.

"They see Malaysia as a successful country, not one that begs or kneels, but one that is truly sovereign.

"Trump invited me to extend my stay, but I told him I could not, as I

needed to attend this Malaysia Day celebration," he said to roaring applause from the 60,000-strong crowd at the Likas Sports Complex here last night.

Present were Sabah Yang di-Per-tua Tun Juhar Mahiruddin and his wife, Toh Puan Norlidah R.M. Jasni. Also present were Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Chief Minister Tan Sri Musa Aman, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak and state and federal leaders.

In his speech, Najib said the Federal Government would continue to respect Sabah's rights, adding that this could be seen from the establishment of a special committee to study Sabah and Sarawak rights under the Malaysia Agreement 1963.

"We will discuss as siblings in a family. Sabah's rights will continue to be respected by the Federal Government.

"So, there is no need for slogans like 'Sabah for Sabah' and 'Sarawak for Sarawak'. We want Sabah for Malaysia and Malaysia for Sabah, and we will continue moving forward together.

"Decisions will be made soon on the rights of Sabah folk."

He said the government was committed to closing the development gap between Sabah and the peninsula, as well as bring more progress to the state.

He said there would be special allocations for more basic facilities in rural Sabah and Sarawak.

"The government has given RM4.14 billion to the electricity sector in Sabah and Labuan from 2012 to last year.

"This year alone, RM390 million in government subsidies, via Petronas, went to reducing the electricity tariff here.

"We will continue strengthening Sabah. There is no need for the opposition to mislead the people."

Najib praised Musa for bringing progress and development to Sabah.

"Sabah has prospered under the leadership of Chief Minister Tan Sri Musa Aman. I also want to congratulate him for his recent 'Tan Sri' title."

He brushed aside criticism by the opposition regarding the purchase of airplanes by Malaysia Airlines from US aircraft manufacturer Boeing.

He said the allegation that the deal would "benefit the US" was not true as it would actually ben-

efit Malaysia Airlines, adding that this would help the national carrier be more competitive.

"MAS (Malaysia Airlines) must adapt to having the most efficient planes in the world. We cannot be left behind when other airlines have Dreamliners (Boeing 787).

"We want to be on the frontline to attract more tourists to Malaysia, to Sabah. The state is beautiful and has a lot of potential."

He explained the opposition's queries on why the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) invested in US and not in Malaysia.

"EPF has a RM760 billion fund. It would not be logical if we only invested in KLSE (Bursa Malaysia).

"What happens if the market fell and we could not diversify? So we invest in other countries.

"This is not a decision by politicians, but by the (EPF) investment committee. That is why EPF can give good dividends."

Page 1 caption: Children waving the Jalur Gemilang at the Malaysia Day celebration in Kota Kinabalu yesterday.