

Cameron: UK's relationship with Malaysia "hugely important"
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KUALA LUMPUR: British Prime Minister David Cameron's visit to Malaysia, which kicked off Thursday, sees him participate in a bilateral meeting with Malaysian officials as well as witness the signing ceremony of Malaysia-United Kingdom Joint Statement in Higher Education at Nottingham University's local campus.

Cameron's visit takes place nine months after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's visit to the UK, and is expected to increase momentum in bilateral ties between the nations.

During his visit, Cameron took some time to respond to a Q&A.

Your visit here this week suggests that you attach major importance to the bilateral relationship. What do you hope to achieve?

Our relationship with Malaysia is hugely important to the UK but quite frankly it's one that has been neglected in the past. Today I will be the first British Prime Minister to visit to Malaysia since 1993 and I want my visit to build on the relationship Prime Minister Najib and I reinvigorated during Prime Minister Najib's state visit to the UK last July. I want to continue developing a broad based partnership based on shared values and strong cooperation on education, skills, trade and defence.

Malaysia is becoming one of the great emerging powers of the 21st century with the 26th largest economy in the world. But the UK only accounts for 1% of Malaysia's total imports and I want to change that. We already have strong educational ties with Malaysia but I want our commercial ties to match this. That's why I'm visiting with some of the best British companies to showcase what we can offer and how our two countries can work together to create jobs and prosperity.

What can Britain offer Malaysia?

Well, apart from the Premier League, which I know many Malaysians follow closely, I think there's a huge range of issues where we can work together.

With some 14,000 Malaysian students in the UK and more than 45,000 studying here for UK qualifications, our education ties are unparalleled. I'm delighted too that so many British universities are setting up campuses in Malaysia. From Newcastle to Nottingham, this represents a real example of the high quality education the UK can offer Malaysia. Today, we will sign a new agreement which commits both countries to an enhanced partnership in education and skills training, alongside the doubling of Chevening scholarships as a result of support from BAE Systems. In the field of energy, British technology is playing a key role in supporting the further development of Malaysia's oil and gas industry.

And as Malaysia invests in its infrastructure to keep up with its economic development, Britain can offer its world class engineering experience in areas like the mass railway expansion that is taking place here.

At the same time, there is no substitute for regular high-level engagement to energise a relationship. In the last three months alone, our two Foreign Ministers have held wide-ranging discussions in London, Defence Ministers have met in Jakarta, senior officials

from our respective Home Affairs Ministries have met to discuss how best to work together to tackle transnational crime and the Malaysian Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform has met its British counterparts to exchange thinking on the electoral process. On this visit, I have brought with me our Ministers for Trade and Higher Education and my National Security Adviser. And our Defence Minister will arrive this coming weekend. This will be a further opportunity to discuss how British defence technologies can provide Malaysia with operational edge in this region.

When you met (Najib) last year in London, there seemed to be a meeting of minds over Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's plans for a Global Movement of Moderates and on other international issues. Is that still the case?

Both Prime Minister Najib and I believe that democracy is the route to economic prosperity and as I said this morning in Indonesia, it is strong and vibrant democracy that guarantees our citizens' safety, prosperity and religious identity.

These are themes that Prime Minister Najib talked about in Oxford last year and which are embodied in his Global Movement of Moderates. We share the same ambition to reject violent extremism and to create prosperity for our people.

And we share many objectives in global affairs. We both want to ensure that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon that would threaten the security of the region and the world. And we both hope that Iran will enter into constructive dialogue with the international community when they meet for talks in Istanbul later this month. It is for Iran to convince the world that their programme is for peaceful energy and not for nuclear weapons.

We have both supported strong UN resolutions on Syria. And as the regime's violence against its own people intensifies, it is vital that the international community stands together and condemns this murderous regime. Closer to this region, we all applaud the dramatic changes which have taken place in Burma in the past year, and most recently the by-elections which enable Aung San Suu Kyi to take her rightful place in Parliament. Britain is Burma's largest bilateral aid donor and we will continue to support the consolidation of democracy in that country and the ending of ethnic conflict. Creating a climate in which Burmese refugees can return home without fear of violence must be in everyone's interest.

We are also committed members of the Commonwealth and both argued strongly at the Commonwealth Summit in Perth last October for a reinvigorated organisation that is more relevant to its citizens. Our respective monarchies provide a stability that many other countries envy. It is particularly fitting that in Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Year, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will visit Malaysia in a few months' time as part of that celebration. It is testament to Britain's commitment to strengthening our relationship with Malaysia and I am looking forward to being in Kuala Lumpur today and further developing my relationship with Prime Minister Najib.

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