

## **Najib's Visit To Myanmar To Boost Bilateral Ties**

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**By Leslean Arshad**

NAYPYITAW, (Myanmar), March 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's official two-day visit to Myanmar, beginning Wednesday, is an opportunity for both nations to elevate the current bilateral cooperation to new heights.

Describing the visit as significant amid the long, good standing bilateral ties, Malaysian Ambassador to Myanmar Dr Ahmad Faisal Mohamed said it could open a wide door to more government-to-government (G-G) collaboration and trade and investment flows.

"Our bilateral G-G has always been strong...in trade and investment, we are not doing that badly but we can take these opportunities to talk about areas we can further develop. There's huge potential," he told Malaysian journalists covering Najib's visit here Tuesday.

Ahmad Faisal said that Malaysian investors and businessmen who were serious about investing in Myanmar should come in now.

He said business and investment communities now were optimistic with the investment outlook in Myanmar as the new government was determined to reform in all areas to facilitate businesses and investments.

"There's a rush, Myanmar has become the new hot destination for businessmen," he said.

"Everybody is interested in Myanmar, if you are late, all the opportunities will be gone," he said.

The total trade between Malaysia and Myanmar last year stood at RM2.43 billion, an increase of 26.8 per cent as compared with 2010.

Among the big Malaysian corporations that currently have presence in Myanmar are national petroleum company Petronas and hotelier Micasa.

Dr Ahmad Faisal said, among the areas that Myanmar could tap from Malaysia's strength were in the plantation and manufacturing sectors.

Over 50 Malaysian businessmen from various sectors such as telecommunications, construction, timber and agriculture will also be in the Myanmar capital to avail themselves to opportunities during Najib's visit.

Najib is scheduled to meet selected Myanmar business leaders and attend business luncheon talks at the Myanmar International Convention Centre on Thursday.

Dr Ahmad Faisal said, among the collaborations that could be further developed between Malaysia and Myanmar was in the area of capacity building where Myanmar was one of the recipients in the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme, with over 1,000 Malaysians benefitting from the technical programme.

"We would like to hear from them on the areas they want us to cater for their immediate needs, we can assist, so it will be more effective" he said, adding that Malaysia was also willing to extend assistance to Myanmar on the looming Asean chairmanship task in 2014.

Malaysia and Myanmar also could look into ways to improve mechanism on the labour issue, he noted.

The visit, the first for Najib since becoming prime minister in April 2009, was also significant, following the current reform process initiated by the new government, he said.

"We have the opportunity to express our support with the process in Myanmar and the leaders to renew their commitment to cooperate bilaterally, regionally or internationally," added Dr Ahmad Faisal.

Najib will have a packed programme in the Myanmar capital where among others, he is scheduled to engage in a restricted meeting with Myanmar President U Thein Sein.

After six decades of military dictatorship, Myanmar is fast moving towards greater democratisation under Thein Sein. Myanmar will also call for by-elections on April 1, that will see former political detainee Aung San Suu Kyi taking part.

Najib will be accompanied by wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, several cabinet ministers, including Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein and deputy ministers in a 100 member-strong delegation.

The last official visit to Myanmar by a Malaysian prime minister was in 2004 when Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi made the trip.

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