

Najib Hosts Dinner In Honour Of French PM And Wife
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PUTRAJAYA, July 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak hosted an official dinner in honour of French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and wife Brigitte at Seri Perdana here Monday.

Present were Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Tun Hussein.

Ayrault arrived here yesterday (Sunday) on a two-day working visit to Malaysia, as part of his three-nation regional tour, which included New Caledonia and South Korea, aimed at enhancing existing areas of cooperation and broadening into new spheres of cooperation.

In his speech, Najib welcomed France's increasing focus on Asia under the current leadership of President Francois Hollande.

"Malaysia views France as an important strategic partner, not only within the European Union, but also at the international level. And your (Ayrault's) visit will increase the strategic co-operation between our two countries, thus setting the stage for President Hollande's visit to Malaysia in the near future," he said.

Najib also hoped the bilateral relationship between both countries would strengthen the growing momentum in trade, investment, education, defence and tourism, as well as in energy, biotechnology, transport and oceanography which had developed many years ago.

"Economic cooperation, especially in trade and investment, remains the mainstay of Malaysia-France bilateral relations. Despite the Eurozone crisis and challenges in the global economy, trade between our nations has increased since 2009.

"France is now Malaysia's 16th largest global trading partner, and 3rd largest amongst EU member states.

"As our economic transformation programme opens up more sectors of our economy, French investment continues to break new barriers - such as the project in Sendayan Techvalley or in the joint venture with Korea to build a world first bio refinery plant in Terengganu," he added.

The prime minister also expressed his happiness on the increase in French tourists to Malaysia, which recorded 40,000 for the first quarter of this year, an increase of 10 per cent over last year.

He said Air France's recent decision to begin direct flights between Kuala Lumpur and Paris was perfectly timed, as 2014 was Visit Malaysia Year.

"I am confident that better connections will encourage more French tourists to visit Malaysia, to enjoy our many attractions, the natural environment, culture and food.

"We can assign a dollar value to our economic co-operation but building stronger people-to-people relations, encouraging the ideas, values and perhaps, the occasional

recipe, brings a much wider benefit," he said.

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