

Najib Visits Astana To Enhance Malaysia-Kazakhstan Bilateral Ties

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ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN), May 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak is scheduled to arrive here Thursday for a three-day official visit in efforts to enhance bilateral ties in various fields between Malaysia and Kazakhstan.

During the visit, the prime minister's second since 2011, he will be given the honour to deliver a keynote address at the Astana Economic Forum as a special guest of Kazakhstan President, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Malaysian ambassador to Kazakhstan, Datuk Hidayat Abdul Hamid said the visit, at the invitation of Nazarbayev, was to pave the way for both countries to enhance bilateral relations in the fields of politics, economy, trade and investment as well as collaboration in education and tourism.

"Malaysia is seen by Kazakhstan as a moderate and progressive country. President Kazakhstan often makes Malaysia as an example of a developing country that is stable," he told a media conference with Malaysian journalists here.

Najib will be accorded an official welcome on Friday afternoon in the Presidential Palace and to be followed by a meeting with Nazarbayev and delegates conference to discuss various joint interests and future opportunities.

Hidayat said Kazakhstan, the world's ninth biggest country located in Central Asia, was currently vigorously developing its transport infrastructure sector in efforts to build land bridges to connect Asia and Europe.

Several Malaysian companies were currently located in Kazakhstan with an investment valued at AS\$500 million, including in oil and gas as well as the biggest industrial cement plant in Central Asia through the Central Asia Cement company in Karganda in South Astana.

The plant produces over 1.3 million metric tonnes of cement annually.

Kazakhstan's focus in the infrastructural construction sector had attracted investors from Malaysia, including Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) and construction companies that had visited the country for such opportunities.

"This has resulted in the prime minister's current visit, with several memorandum of understanding (MoU) to be signed between companies of both countries such as in the infrastructural construction, downstream petroleum and transport sectors.

At present bilateral trade between Malaysia and Kazakhstan was minimal, recording AS\$56 million last year which was to Malaysia's favour, said Hidayat.

Kazakhstan, among others, imported electric and electronic items, steel-based goods, furniture, palm oil and chemical products from Malaysia and exported agricultural as well as steel and iron products.

Malaysia is also increasingly becoming the choice of students from Kazakhstan to pursue their tertiary education and last year recorded 1,500 students studying in Malaysia.

The figures can be double-fold if those undergoing short-term courses in Malaysia is taken into account.

In the field of tourism, Malaysia is a favourite destination for tourists from Kazakhstan, especially during the winter.

Astana is the second coldest capital in the world with the lowest temperature of -40 degrees celcius during winter ever being recorded while it can rise to over 30 degrees celcius during summer.

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