

Malaysia, Australia Upgrade Ties To Strategic Partnership

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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Australia, enjoying a long-standing relationship that goes back 60 years, have agreed to elevate their ties to a strategic partnership.

This agreement was reached between Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and new Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at their first bilateral talks here Sunday on the sidelines of the ongoing 27th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits.

An Australia-Malaysia Joint Declaration of Strategic Partnership was issued following the decision that was made on the 60th anniversary of Australia's diplomatic presence in Malaysia.

Describing the development as a major decision, Najib, at a joint press conference with Turnbull after their meeting, said: "Malaysia and Australia are on a very strong footing and there are a lot of opportunities for us to deepen and enhance the relationship."

Turnbull said the strategic partnership would bring the two countries closer.

Following this development, the Australian and Malaysian foreign ministers would meet annually, backed by discussions between senior officials in the areas of defence, foreign affairs and other fields, he said.

According to the joint declaration, these meetings would allow an exchange of views, ideas and initiatives to develop a shared understanding of strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

The prime ministers, according to the joint declaration, directed officials to explore areas for further practical cooperation including policy planning, consular policy and practice, development cooperation and disaster preparedness and response.

The joint declaration said the prime ministers emphasised the importance of promoting a rules-based international order, respect for international law, ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce.

They expressed concern about recent and ongoing developments in the South China Sea which have eroded trust and confidence and increased tensions, it said.

They agreed on the importance of refraining from the use or threat of force, of exercising self-restraint and of avoiding actions that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability in the South China Sea.

They stressed the need to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Declaration of Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea in its entirety and urged for the early establishment of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Both prime ministers, in the joint declaration, also expressed grave concern over the rise of non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, foreign terrorist fighters and cyber security challenges.

They also agreed to strengthen further security cooperation, including through enhanced exchange of intelligence and analysis.

"The Prime Ministers directed the Joint Working Group on Transnational Crime to enhance engagement under the 2014 Memorandum of Understanding on Transnational Crime," the declaration said.

To consolidate trade, ministers responsible for trade were directed to convene the Joint Trade Committee Meeting at least once every two years.

On education, the two prime ministers directed the annual Joint Working Group on Education to expand exchanges and cooperation in line with memorandums of understanding on cooperation in the field.

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