

Najib Summarises Four Main Benefits Of King Salman's Visit To Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, March 2 (Bernama) -- The maiden visit of Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud will not only firm up Kuala Lumpur-Riyadh ties but will give numerous direct benefits to the people.

Summarising the four-day visit, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the preparedness of the Saudi Arabian Government to increase three-fold the scholarships for Malaysian students from next year was among four important issues as a result of the visit.

"The scholarship means more students will be able to further their studies at renowned universities there and this complements and boosts the RM4.3 billion government allocation for scholarships under the 2017 Budget," he said in his latest entry on najibrazak.com blog.

King Salman's state visit to Malaysia was at the invitation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V, and was his first visit to an Islamic nation in Southeast Asia since he ascended the throne in 2015.

In addition, Najib regarded the visit as paving the way to Malaysia's request for an increase in haj quota and two Malaysian haj pilgrim centres in Makkah and Madinah.

Prior to this, the prime minister was reported as saying that the Saudi Arabian Government had given a positive feedback on Malaysia's request for an increase in the haj quota to 30,000 this year.

"We have heard of those who had to wait up to 40 years to perform the haj, and I am committed to ensure such incidents (long wait) will be reduced.

"I hope and pray our request will be given due consideration to facilitate Malaysian Muslims in performing the haj in a more conducive environment," he said.

In addition, Najib said the visit of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques also brought benefit in terms of employment and investment in the country, specifically with the injection of RM31.08 billion (US\$7 billion) in investment by Saudi Arabian petroleum company, Saudi Aramco in the Refinery and Petrochemical Integrated Development (RAPID), in Pengerang, Johor.

"I believe it will create more opportunities for the people, from job opportunities to development in support industries such as retail, finance, construction, service and many more.

"Other industries like the halal economy, Islamic financial service and small and medium industries (SME) will also benefit," he added.

Previously, Najib said, Malaysia's ties with the Saudi Arabian Government mostly gravitated around issues related to the umrah (small haj) and haj while bilateral trade between both nations was modest, namely RM13.99 billion last year.

He said this could simultaneously repeal the negative stories being spread on Malaysia by certain quarters for personal political interests, apart from wild allegations that Malaysia would either become bankrupt or the nation would be sold to outsiders through foreign investments.

"This is far from the truth. Foreign investments create jobs for our people, at the same time we retain ownership and full sovereignty," assured the prime minister.

"Furthermore, we are currently targeting to go up on our value chain, including high income jobs such as architect, engineer, accountant, chemist and many more. Such investments from abroad are a sign of high confidence in our economy," he said.

In addition, Najib said the visit also brought numerous opportunities in Saudi Arabia for Malaysia's commerce and entrepreneurs.

Among them, the Saudi Arabian target to boost life expectancy from 74 years to 80 years paved the way for the health industry, especially care service for the elderly.

Meanwhile, the target to hike the number of visitors performing the umrah from eight million to 30 million will result in an increase in demand for sectors such as telco and ICT, infrastructure, digital content, energy, tourism and hospitality, health, green technology, retail and also transportation.

"Unique opportunities will also be open for business in sectors such as e-commerce, renewable energy, entertainment and recreation, financial service and many more," noted Najib.

He also hoped Malaysian entrepreneurs would be more innovative and take advantage of the opportunities available to expand and create ties with Saudi Arabia.

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