

Najib: Malaysia will not hold separate talks with EU

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will not turn its back on Asean by holding separate talks with the European Union (EU) with regards to any free trade agreement (FTA).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said it should be a collective negotiation between the two regions, adding that Malaysia would play a leading role to revive the stalled EU-Asean FTA negotiations.

"We have not taken the position that we should negotiate separately," he said during a brief dialogue session at the inaugural Malaysia-Europe Forum at a hotel here yesterday.

Najib said this in response to British High Commissioner Boyd McCleary's question whether Malaysia would be interested in a bilateral engagement with the EU, as the EU-Asean FTA negotiation was getting nowhere.

McCleary said other Asean member countries such as Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam had shown interest in a bilateral engagement with the EU.

Najib had said in his speech earlier that the

United Kingdom had made its stand clear that Myanmar should not benefit from the EU-Asean FTA.

Najib said Asean felt Myanmar would not be an impediment, as greater trade opportunities would open the doors to political reform.

He said that next year would be a pivotal year, as Asean would reassess Myanmar's commitments, adding that the outlook seemed good as the ruling government had released political prisoners and the United States had eased pressure on the ruling junta.

Najib noted that the Asean-EU negotiations were stalled because of issues ranging from cultural differences to gaps in governance, transparency and negotiation style.

"My administration is fully committed to helping get the issues to the table and I hope there will be sufficient motivation from both the EU and Asean teams to resume discussions as soon as possible," he said.

Najib noted that in 2007, Asean attracted foreign direct investment amounting to about RM235bil, of which 23% came from the EU.

Later at the forum, Najib also called on Malaysian manufacturers to abide by the standard imposed by the EU on seafood.