

Sultan of Brunei to visit India

India's energy diplomacy is set to get a boost when Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, one of the world's longest serving monarchs, comes here on a four-day visit later this month.

This will be the first visit by the sultan to India in over a decade.

"The sultan of Brunei will come to India on a state visit May 21. Expanding energy partnership will be high on the agenda," an official source told IANS Tuesday.

Brunei has been asking India to cut oil and gas import duties as part of the proposed India-Asean free trade agreement. "This issue will be discussed between the two sides," the source said.

Brunei, which does not have any indigenous industry, is likely to pitch for more trade and investment from India. It is increasingly looking at India as a knowledge power and is keen on expanding the Indian presence in its IT sector.

Brunei, a country of nearly 400,000 people that became independent in 1984, has vast reserves of oil and gas. This accounts for one of the highest living standards in the world.

A member of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Brunei has actively backed the inclusion of India as a full dialogue partner in the regional grouping.

Bilateral trade between India and Brunei has more than doubled to \$200 million in the last five years. Oil and gas account for over 80 percent of India's imports from Brunei.

The two countries are also collaborating in areas ranging from space and biotechnology to infrastructure and mining.

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