# Alike countries think great

**Kazakhstan and Malaysia mark the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this month. Both countries, multiethnic and multireligious, boast of vibrant economies and tackle global issues in a similar manner. R. ZEENEESHRI writes**

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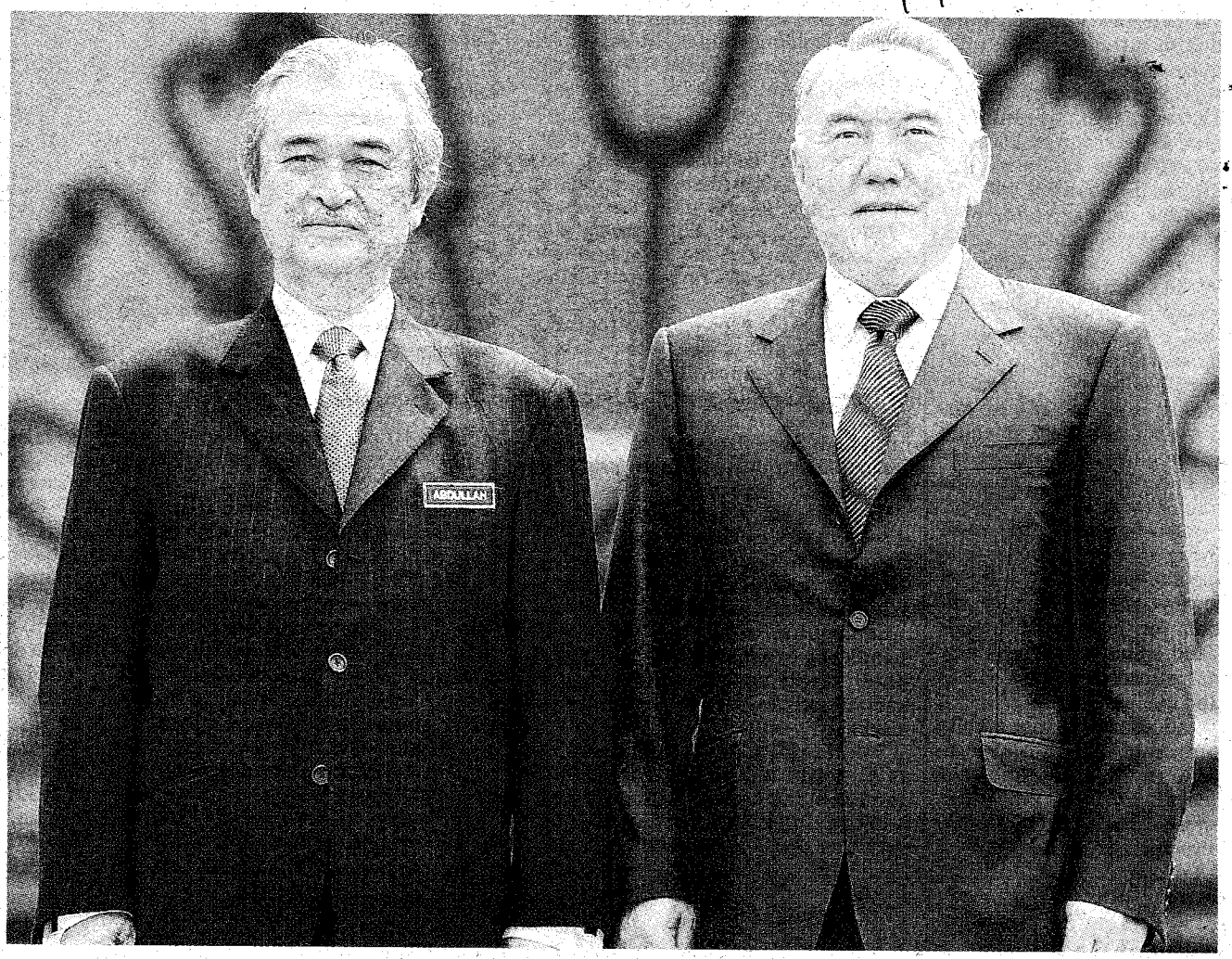

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev (right) visited Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in June in Putrajaya.

IN October 1997, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev unveiled "Kazakhstan 2030: Prosperity, Security and Improvement of Welfare of All Kazakhstanis", a long-term development strategy for the country.

Kazakhstan, located in the centre of Eurasia, can serve as a trade conduit between China, Russia, Europe and the Muslim world, especially Malaysia.

On March 16, Kazakhstan and Malaysia marked the 15th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations.

Over that short period of time, both sides established friendly and mutually-beneficial relations.

A great impetus to that was the opening in 1996 of the embassies of Kazakhstan and Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur and Almaty.

Kazakhstan-Malaysia relations enjoy political dialogue at the highest level.

In May 1996, Nazarbayev made his first official visit to Malaysia.

The same year in July, the then-prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad reciprocated with an official visit to Kazakhstan.

In February 2001, Nazarbayev visited Malaysia once again in a private capacity and met with Dr Mahathir.

Akhan Bizhanov, Chairman of the Kazakhstan Senate's Committee on International Affairs, Defence and Security, said: "We have good contacts with the old and new leadership of the Malaysian government. Between our visits, we have signed a number of documents and understandings which have brought our countries closer."

Last year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and a delegation from Kazakhstan discussed the status and outlook for Kazakhstan-Malaysia partnership.

In the course of the visit, a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, as well as a number of bilateral business memoranda and agreements were signed.

The official launch of the Bahasa Malaysia version of Nazarbayev's book *Critical Decade* was done during that visit.

The state visit has added an enormous impetus to bilateral contacts at various levels.

Bizhanov said: "The 15 years of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Kazakhstan is a very important one for both countries, since we share many qualities, including politics, religion and culture. Like Malaysia, Kazakhstan is also a multiethic country.'

Malaysia and Kazakthstan, both multiethnic and multireligious, have many similarities in the approaches to topical issues of global nature, such as the fight against the terrorism and drug trafficking, relations between Muslim world and the West, the establishment of a fair trade and investment system for developing countries.

Kazakhstan and Malaysia co-operate within multilateral bodies, such as, United Nations, OIC, Asian Dialogue for Cooperation.

Malaysia has the status of observer in CICA process, while Kazakhstan intends to join the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in 2008.

Malaysia is a member of the working group on Kazakhstan's accession in World Trade Organisation.

"Kazakhstan is the leading economic power in Central Asia, just as Malaysia is in Southeast Asia," added Bizhanov.

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Since 2002, the trade volume between the two countries has almost tripled, reaching US$35 million (RM121 million) in 2003.

In 2004, the number dropped to US$30 million, while in 2005, it doubled to reach US$60 million.

Between January and November last year, trade turnover reached US$56.5 million (according to Kazakh data).

"The trade has not reached a sufficient level for us and we see a lot of opportunity in our relationship for the future. Malaysia is rich in its resources and we are also, especially in oil. Also, investors can tap our technology, such as radio and IT."

Malaysian exports to Kazakhstan include electrical appliances, chemical products, furniture, palm oil and machinery. It imports crude minerals, metals and animal products.

The second meeting of the Joint Kazakhstan-Malaysia Trade and Economic Committee is scheduled for this year in Astana.

The first meeting took place in 1998 in Kuala Lumpur.

The committee is co-chaired from the Malaysian side by Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Over the last year, business circles of both countries have displayed more interest in developing mutually-beneficial ties.

In 2005, Kazakhstan adopted the Malaysian *halal* standard MS-1500.

Kazakh businesses took part in the Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS-2006), and they received the first prize among foreign exhibitors.

The deterring factor in trade and economic co-operation is lack of transport corridors.

A significant part of export-import deliveries between Kazakhstan and Malaysia is carried out through the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.

At the same time, Malaysia-made electronics and household electronic goods are re-exported to Kazakhstan through third countries, such as, United Arab Emirates, Russia and European states.

"We are looking into developing our trading with Malaysia via Chinese ports.

"We have very good relations with China and sometimes, I even call this relationship a partnership. And we are more than willing to employ the co-operation of delivering the goods through China," said Bizhanov.

"Of course, it would be a lot better to have direct flights from Kuala Lumpur to Kazakhstan, either to Almaty or Astana.

"Both countries have expressed their interest in introducing such a flight, and I believe it will be a matter of time before it's done."

Development of relations between the two countries has put Malaysia high on the priority list for the Kazakh students willing to study abroad under the presidential programme "Bolashak" ("The Future" in Kazakh language).

As of December, 110 Kazakh students expressed their willingness to enrol in Malaysian universities, primarily in IT and technical courses.

"We also have well-developed sectors in Kazakhstan, such as, chemistry, physics, geology and mining science. According to their scientific merit, they are of world status and importance. We will be glad if Malaysians see this as an opportunity as well

"We are eager to diversify our economy. And we are working in many of our industries, especially machine building and modern science. We are focusing on science sectors, as we need new technologies in construction.

"President Nazarbayev recently made a State of the Nation address where he stressed on diversifying our economy.

"And in this aspect, we see a big potential in the current and future bilateral co-operation between Malaysia and Kazakhstan."

YAYASAN KEPIMPINAN PERDANA