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# M'sia and Laos to enhance ties

Both countries to diversify trade activities and develop industries

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Malaysia and Laos are eager to explore potentials in developing the halal industry to diversify trade activities between the two countries.

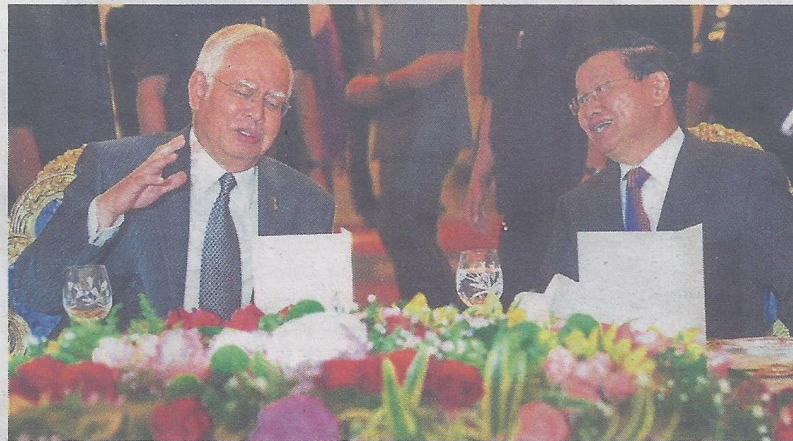
The two countries are also planning to enhance investment cooperation with Laos expressing commitment to ensure ease of doing business for Malaysian investors.

Economy was the main topic of discussion between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and visiting Laos Prime Minister Dr Thongloun Sisoulith who is here for a two-day official visit.

This is the first visit by Dr Thongloun in his capacity as Prime Minister of Laos since assuming the post in April last year.

The two leaders agreed that increasing interactions at all levels have generated better understanding and reinforced friendship between Malaysia and Laos.

The improved accessibility through direct flight services to



**In good spirits:** Najib and Dr Thongloun sharing a light moment during the official luncheon at Seri Perdana. — Bernama

Vientiane and Luang Prabang, has helped expand bilateral economic partnership and people-to-people connection, as well as allowing access to the untapped tourism potentials in both countries.

According to statistics, there has been a marked increase in tourist arrivals from Laos to Malaysia with 31,061 visitors last year compared to the 24,228 in 2015.

“On education and human resource development, the Prime Minister encouraged more Laotian students and officials to pursue their education in Malaysia. The Prime Minister also announced that more places for Laotian students on scholarship will be made available,” said a statement from Wisma Putra.

To mark the visit, a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the area of

Science, Technology and Innovation was signed between the two governments that will provide for knowledge sharing, expertise and facilitate scientific and technological capabilities for the purpose of advancing the economies of both countries.

Dr Thongloun was earlier given an official welcome at Dataran Perdana.

At the Malaysia-Laos Business Forum which Dr Thongloun officiated, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed said with both countries undergoing economic liberalisation initiatives, efforts must be made to promote strategic partnership, particularly among the private sector.

Malaysia's trade with Laos is on the upward trend, with total trade in 2016 up by 76% to US\$30.96mil (RM135.2mil) compared to US\$17.7mil (RM77.9mil) in 2015 with building materials, machinery tools, consumer products and medical disposable products as key areas targeted to boost exports.