

## **Foreign Envoys Keen On Strengthening Bilateral Ties In 2013**

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**By Azzah Mohamad**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Foreign envoys are keen on strengthening bilateral ties with Malaysia in 2013 after a successful 2012.

Russia's ambassador to Malaysia, Lyudmila G.Vorobyeva is optimistic that Malaysia and Russia will have strong bilateral relations next year.

She said that 2012 has been a fruitful year, pointing out especially the meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, in September which had been successful. The meeting had taken place during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit in Vladivostok.

"Hopefully, strong bilateral relations will continue in 2013. We are looking forward to more exchange of visits, especially at the highest level," she told Bernama.

She said that in 2012, more than 3,000 Malaysian students had gone to Russia to pursue a course in medicine. In addition, the number of Russian tourists visiting Malaysia had also increased.

With regard to bilateral trade, a number of business missions from different parts of Russia had visited Malaysia this year. They are keen on implementing several joint investment projects, she said.

Luc Vandebon, European Union's (EU) Ambassador and the Head of the EU Delegation to Malaysia, said 2013 is an important year for Malaysia, as the country will hold general elections.

"Regardless of the result, the elections will certainly be a defining moment for Malaysia," he said.

The year 2013 could also be an important one for bilateral relations between EU and Malaysia. Three major agreements could be signed: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VTA).

"I am confident that we will sign major agreements that we can be proud of," said Vandebon.

According to Vandebon, the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony is one of the unforgettable moments, when the EU won the award this year.

"After winning the Nobel Peace Prize, the EU has increased its efforts to maintain peace and prosperity in the world. The EU has helped nations that are fighting for freedom," the envoy said.

Another event that the EU is proud of is the Pleading Competition, held at the Parliament building recently, to propagate the abolition of death penalty, for which the EU will continue its initiative next year.

Vandebon thanked Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz for his invaluable support. Nazri said the government is keen on abolishing the mandatory death

sentence for drug offences. It is planning to replace death sentence with other methods of punishment.

Vietnam's Ambassador to Malaysia, Nguyen Hong Thao, said Vietnam and Malaysia have constantly developed their relations in many areas on the basis of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the Asean solidarity.

Thao also pointed out that Vietnam and Malaysia will celebrate the 40th anniversary of their diplomatic relations in 2013, which he said is an important event.

He hopes that both the countries will work closely to strengthen bilateral ties and stand by each other in the international fora, especially when the Asean Community is realised in 2015.

As for trade, according to Thao, as of November 2012, bilateral trade had reached over US\$6.5 billion. By the end of November 2012, Malaysia had been ranked 7th out of over 90 foreign investors in Vietnam, with 432 projects and a total registered capital of US\$11.3 billion.

Cultural ties between the two countries have also been enhanced, he said.

"We hope that the multi-faceted cooperation between Vietnam and Malaysia will continue to expand in the coming years," said Thao, who was posted here in June 2011.

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