

Malaysia-Kazakhstan Ready to Expand Cooperation and Partnership
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By Ahmad Fuad Yahya

ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN), May 28 (Bernama) -- It was an extraordinary visit by Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak to this city - the world's second coldest capital - three days ago when he became the special guest to two events relating to Kazakhstan's economic and cultural fields.

On Friday the prime minister was given the honour to deliver a keynote address at the Astana Economic Forum (ATF) as a special guest of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

The following day Najib and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor together with Nazarbayev were the special guests at the orchestra concert held in conjunction with the 15th anniversary of the Kazakhstan National University of Arts at the university campus before flying home.

In between the two events Najib, who was on a three-day official visit to Kazakhstan, met Prime Minister Karim Massimov and later with Nazarbayev and held productive talks, which resulted into both countries agreeing to enhance future bilateral cooperation to a new level of comprehensive partnership.

At the end of their discussions, Najib and Nazarbayev reaffirmed their commitment to work together to realise the goal, which they believed would lead to a win-win cooperation that could bring mutual benefits to both countries.

Kazakhstan, situated in Central Asia, is the world's largest landlocked country besides being the ninth largest country in the world that experienced extreme climate from -40 degrees celcius in winter and to over 30 degrees celcius in summer. It is also unique in its topography.

One third of the country is covered by steppe vegetation and just imagine yourself driving through the steppe with an outside temperature of 35 degrees celcius and a view of the snow-capped mountains, which is only an hour's drive away and a few hundred kilometres farther you will find a dense forest.

It is rich in natural resources and has a population of over 17 million people.

Malaysian Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Datuk Hidayat Abdul Hamid said the visit was fruitful and Najib and Nazarbayev have had several opportunities to exchange views on various matters, through the special events which were organised in conjunction with his

visit.

"Through this type of meetings, many understanding and information on the

Condition in Kazakhstan and Malaysia are being understood and this information exchanges are important to understand both countries.

"As was informed by the prime minister prior to this, the Kazakhstan president views Malaysia as a modern and progressive Islamic country as well as a model of development during the early days after independence," he said.

Hidayat said the talks between both leaders had resulted in the opening up of many opportunities for greater cooperation between the two countries in the fields of economy and Islamic banking, agriculture, education, higher education and tourism.

The ambassador was confident that the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Kazakhstan would advance to a higher level, especially with the Malaysian embassy here expected to open its branch office in Almaty before year's end to place officials from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Miti) or Matrade and Tourism Malaysia.

Both sides, he said were very sensitive to the needs to increase bilateral trade, which was currently very nominal.

Kazakhstan was now aggressively developing its transportation facilities, including railway lines to move goods and build a land bridge to connect Europe and Asia, he said.

Its access to sea is through China, where Kazakhstan has invested in the construction of a logistics terminal together with China, in the eastern port of Lianyungang.

Kazakhstan is also building warehouse facilities and a hub at the border between the country and China as the measurement of railway tracks differ between the Asian gauge and the European gauge and will require the goods to be transferred to the respective rail facility.

Kazakhstan has invited Malaysian companies to participate in this project.

To increase connectivity, both countries have also agreed to explore the possibility of increasing the frequency of flights between Almaty and Kuala Lumpur.

In banking, Hidayat said Malaysia would share its expertise and experience in helping Kazakhstan to turn its old capital Almaty, in the country's south, to a regional centre for Islamic banking and finance.

In this regard, a Bank Negara team would soon be sent to Kazakhstan while central bank officials of Kazakhstan will also visit Kuala Lumpur, he said.

During the visit, his second since 2011, Najib and Massimov had witnessed the signing of three memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between Malaysian companies and their respective counterparts to undertake business projects with a total value of US\$1.1 billion.

The MoUs were between Markmore Sdn Bhd and the administration of Mangystau region for the construction of a methanol plant in Kuryk; Kenmakmur Holdings Sdn Bhd and the Administration of Mangystau region for the LPG plant in Kuryk and Agrostan Farms Sdn Bhd and the administration of Zhambyl region for cattle rearing.

Meanwhile KLIA Consultancy Services with its partner, TRC Synergy Bhd, is also finalising discussions with Akimat of Astana (Astana Mayor's Office) on the construction of the proposed US\$1 billion new Astana International Airport.

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