

## **Najib's Visit to Turkmenistan a Huge Success**

**Bernamea**

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ASHGABAT (Turkmenistan), June 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's second official visit to Turkmenistan last Monday and Tuesday is considered very successful, having achieved more than what is expected.

The purpose of his visit to this Central Asian country is to strengthen existing cooperation, especially in the field of oil and gas apart from diversifying new fields of cooperation.

The visit becomes more meaningful when Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov told Najib that he had confidence in Malaysia and was prepared to forge cooperation in new fields as well as strengthen existing ties.

Malaysian Ambassador in Turkmenistan, Norman Muhamad said the chemistry between Najib and Berdimuhamedov as well as Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah with his counterpart, Rashid Meredov, also contributed to the success of the prime minister's visit.

He said discussions between Najib and Berdimuhamedov were on various matters towards forging cooperation between Malaysia and Turkmenistan in fields, such as higher education, culture, halal industry, Islamic banking as well as investments in oil and gas through Petronas.

The visit by the Malaysian leader also enables Malaysia to strengthen its strategic partnership with Turkmenistan, a country with the world's fourth largest gas reserve, at 17.5 trillion square metre, after Iran, Russia and Qatar.

Despite having invested US\$8 billion in the oil and gas sector in Turkmenistan, Petronas is having bigger plans following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for long-term cooperation with Turkmenistan's State Agency in Charge of Hydrocarbon.

Petronas participates in the oil and gas industry in Turkmenistan through exploration works in the Caspian Sea since 1996 through a production sharing contract with

Turkmenistan, whereby the Malaysian company undertakes exploration activities before selling any oil and gas through Turkmen Gas.

With such huge investment, Petronas' involvement with the Central Asian country which is rich with oil and gas will become more strategic in future.

Apart from that, Malaysia's commitment to continue to forge ties with Turkmenistan is reflected through the signing of a Joint Statement between Najib and Berdimuhamedov.

The two leaders also witnessed the signing of a Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Malaysian Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz and the Acting Turkmenistan Cultural Minister Annageldi Garajaye and a minute on the terms of reference for a joint trade committee which had been agreed upon.

The minute was signed by Malaysian International Trade and Industry Ministry's deputy secretary-general Mohd Ridzal Sharif and the Turkmenistan Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Affairs Bayer Abayen.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman and Turkmenistan Minister of Education Gulshat Mammedova signed a MoU on education cooperation while a MoU on State Agency in Charge of Hydrocarbon was signed by Petronas president and chief executive officer Tan Sri Shamsul Azhar Abbas and the Director of National Agency for Management of Hydrocarbon Resources at the Turkmenistan President's Office, Yagshygeldi Kakayev.

Following that, Malaysian companies are urged to grab the opportunities by making new investments in sectors, like construction, mining, education, science and technology, halal products and Islamic banking in Turkmenistan, which is in the midst of implementing its five-year development plan, since 2012 involving an allocation of US\$70 billion.

During implementation of the five-year plan, it is giving 1,888 projects, worth US\$40 billion, to foreign companies.

"It is better that Malaysian companies grab the available opportunities with the high confidence Turkmenistan has for Malaysia," said Norman.

For the halal product and Islamic banking, he said, Malaysia could help Turkmenistan through Bank Negara and the Finance Ministry.

Norman planned to hold a halal product exposition in Turkmenistan in an effort to introduce the Malaysia's halal industry to the Turkmenistan's population of six million people, where 93 per cent of them are Muslims.

The prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, also played a role in forging cultural ties with Turkmenistan by inviting designers from the country to participate in the Malaysian Fashion Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur to promote their designs.

Through that platform, she saw ample room for both countries to forge cooperation in the fabric field and to introduce their respective fashion designs at international level.

Malaysia and Turkmenistan also agreed to work closely in the framework of international bodies, like the United Nations (UN), Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the Non-Align Movement (NAM).

Generally, development in Turkmenistan is seen as being influenced by Malaysia, which is seen as a modern and progressive Muslim country and a development model.

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