

**INTERVIEW WITH AL ARABIYA ON HIS MAJESTY KING SALMAN'S VISIT TO MALAYSIA**  
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Turki Aldakhil: Your Excellency Prime Minister, what has Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud's visit to Malaysia represent in terms of cooperation between both countries?

Najib Razak: The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz concluded his state visit to Malaysia. The visit was of a historic dimension because Malaysia is not only the first country visited by King Salman in the Southeast Asia region, but in Asia altogether.

It was a visit with very deep dimensions and implications, long-awaited by all the Malaysians.

The visit had significant effects of many considerations, especially in terms of fraternal relations linking Malaysia with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the mutual desire for security cooperation as well as the relations between the peoples of Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the signing ceremony between Aramco and Petronas was the center point of the visit. It was a tremendous success.

Turki Aldakhil: Malaysia has received King Salman bin Abdulaziz and followed his visit to your country closely, you even took selfies with him. How did you find his leadership?

Najib Razak: I had the pleasure of knowing King Salman through this visit; I spent a lot of time with him. I found that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has a lot of charisma, warmth and care. He has an ample knowledge especially with history and a great desire to encourage cooperation. I have a lot of respect due to his leadership role.

I ventured when I asked King Salman for a selfie. I was surprised and delighted that he accepted my request. I took the selfie with him and I said to myself this is an opportunity to show King Salman in a new angle because he is in fact a very nice person, I wanted to show the human side of King Salman, an aspect which does not appear evidently especially when we adhere to the requirements of the Protocol and the other things we have become accustomed to. I somehow risked it and posted it on Twitter.

But the selfie took Malaysia and Saudi Arabia by a storm and both sides were delighted.

Turki Aldakhil: How big is the cooperation between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council?

Najib Razak: The total volume of trade between Malaysia and the GCC countries amounts to 45 billion ringgits, the equivalent of almost 11 billion US dollars. The United Arab Emirates is ranked first in the trade exchanges and Saudi Arabia comes in the second place. I am confident that the economic and trade relations, as well as the two-way investment will improve more in the future, especially after the visit of King Salman and the signing of the new partnership between Petronas and Aramco.

Moreover, during the visit, we signed a large number of memorandums of understanding between private sector companies in both countries worth more than nine billion ringgit. This is evidence of a great desire on both sides to increase business volume and strengthening the economic ties between them.

Turki Aldakhil: Some describe Malaysia as a successful example of good governance and development. What has been the recipe for success in achieving Malaysia's experience?

Najib Razak: We should assess what we have accomplished so far. When I took office in 2009, one of the challenges I faced was that Malaysia fell into the trap of the so-called middle-income countries. So we needed a new economic model to get us out of this trap and enable us to become a country with high income, a fully developed country with a developed economy. I presented the national transformation plan with its economic and governmental aspect and we refused to accept the state of inertia and the monotony of business.

We needed to show a lot of courage and dare because one who wants to make changes within a nation must be prepared to bring the transformations and this is exactly what we have done. We comprehended the economic structure requirements and chose the method of work. And we started applying the full plan.

The plan has achieved the results that we see today. For example, in 2009, our oil dependence was up to 41 percent, meaning that forty-one percent of the state revenues were dependent on oil. Today, this figure has dropped to 14 percent. Had we not made the transformation that we risked, we would have been suffering today from great difficulties because of the sharp and sudden decline in oil prices which would have affected the government revenues that depend on it to a large extent. In addition, we decided to impose taxes on goods and services as well as rationalizing government support.

These were necessary measures that were not very popular and were faced with a lot of criticism, but we stood our ground. Today we see the results of the measures that we have undertaken a few years ago.

Turki Aldakhil: Has there been cooperation between Malaysia and countries with similar experiences in the Arab world?

Najib Razak: There is definitely a mutual relationship between us and we have a device called a "PEMANDU" which is a unit I created when I took over the reins of office. It is a hybrid unit that combines the private and public sectors with a mission to ensure the implementation of the transition plan that we launched. The members of this unit have visited some GCC and African countries and we transferred our experience to them.

Some of the procedures taken by the Saudi government, which include for example the imposition of tax on goods and services and the rationalization of subsidies and direct financial aid, are some of the measures that we have implemented in Malaysia as part of the Government Transformation Plan.

Turki Aldakhil: To what degree has the Japanese model helped in the success of Malaysia's experience?

Najib Razak: Yes, in the beginning we have benefited from theirs and we have adopted a policy that echoed the two Japanese and Korean experiences because they were the success stories of the seventies and eighties of the last century.

We believed that these were the economic plans that we should follow in their footsteps. We have learned from these two experiments and embraced some of their components. We focused on economic policies and work ethic in both.

We have sent many Malaysian students to Japan and Korea to study in their universities and acquire the Japanese work ethics.

I can tell you that this step has contributed to the achievement of our development, but it was not only limited to the adoption of economic policies, there are other reasons to which we owe the success achieved in our country today.

Turki Aldakhil: Does your country still send Malaysian students to study in Japan?

Najib Razak: Yes, we continue to send our students to Japan and Korea, as well as to almost all parts of the world.

Turki Aldakhil: To what extent did the ethnic and religious diversity contributed in achieving Malaysia's economic success?

Najib Razak: The Malaysian society, as you know, is characterized by great diversity. It is multi-ethnic, multicultural with different religions.

We have been successful in working together as one nation. Of course we have challenges but we have made a great success because we relied on the strengths of each ethnic group and we have adopted a policy to build a national unity.

When I assumed my duty I launched the concept of "One Malaysia" in order to emphasize some of the core values that promote a sense of loyalty and collaboration.

When we have won our independence, many people were not optimistic about our ability to achieve success as a nation but we proved our critics wrong.

Turki Aldakhil: Does society have to be diverse in order for it to succeed?

Najib Razak: The diversity has its merits but it also poses challenges and the most important of these challenges is to avoid internal conflicts between different ethnic groups. We have succeeded in that to a large extent. But most importantly we need to move forward as one synergistic nation. This is what we must work on and I realize that despite the peace and harmony which we enjoy today we need to work to promote national integration and national unity.

Turki Aldakhil: Prime Minister, the poverty rate has dropped to less than one percent in Malaysia. How have you managed to achieve that?

Najib Razak: The fact is the figures are more impressive. When we won our independence, the ratio was above sixty percent, this percentage dropped in 2015 to a very low 0.6%.

Poverty has reduced dramatically thanks to the constant focus on growth, provided that this growth is associated with justice.

We made sure to balance so that everyone can benefit from it without marginalizing any citizen. This is the philosophy that we believe in and we embody with effective measures and programs, and you can see the significant reduction of poverty in Malaysia and increase in income to unprecedented levels.

Turki Aldakhil: Prime Minister, you also succeeded in fighting unemployment and reduced it to the lowest levels. What is the secret to achieving that?

Najib Razak: There is a need achieve growth and promotion of investments. When we said that the private sector should be the engine of growth, we realized that this must be reflected through investments between the public and private sectors.

The public sector was dominant in the past but through the process of transformation that we've made and the policies that we carried out as part of the transition plan since 2009, the private sector became the engine of growth today. When you provide vibrant domestic private sector with direct foreign investments this will lead to the creation of new job opportunities.

I stressed the need for creation of jobs with high salaries to allow the owners to enjoy a high level of income. We did not have the desire to create jobs requiring low skills, because it means a low level of income. We focused mainly on raising the income level through the creation of job opportunities for highly skilled citizens.

Turki Aldakhil: How has Malaysia been able to distance itself from terrorist attacks?

Najib Razak: We have adopted a very tough stance. This position refuses to make any concessions or tolerance for any form of extremism and terrorism.

Some of the measures that we have taking include the legislation of specific new laws to deal specifically with the issues of extremism and terrorism, boosting security forces to be able to arrest extremist elements and bring them to justice before they commit any acts of

terrorism. Because I think that waiting for the commission of terrorist act will lead to the killing and wounding of many people.

However, the condemnation of those before a court of justice requires evidence against them so the jury can find them guilty. This is how we succeeded in avoiding terrorist acts, except for a single incident but it was not meaningful. Malaysia has not seen any major terrorist acts, because we simply adopted a proactive policy.

Turki Aldakhil: Which incident are you referring to?

Najib Razak: The grenade accident which was thrown in the vicinity of a nightclub. It did not result in any deaths, but minor injuries. We were able to arrest about two hundred and seventy people who embraced the ideology of ISIS and these people are no longer a threat.

Turki Aldakhil: Prime Minister, how has Malaysia contributed to fighting terrorism?

Najib Razak: We are cooperating closely with the countries that share the same visions as us. There are, for example, a good inter-agency cooperation for the exchange of intelligence information and timely intervention as we are a party to the peace process in the southern Philippines, where Malaysia is leading this process.

We also cooperate with the people and Government of Thailand to bring peace in southern Thailand. This is for the regional context. Outside our region we also cooperate with other countries since some Malaysians are in the fronts in Syria and Iraq fighting with ISIS. No country can single-handedly address global terrorism because it will require the cooperation of all nations.

Turki Aldakhil: Prime Minister, what are the latest developments of the investigation into the assassination of North Korean leader's step-brother Kim Jong-nam at Kuala Lumpur International Airport?

Najib Razak: As you know, we came to determine the substance used which is the nerve gas VX. It is a deadly chemical weapon listed among weapons of mass destruction.

We need to conduct a DNA examination to ascertain the identity of the deceased. This is a common procedure and we are waiting for the DNA samples to identify the corpse. So we cannot hand over the body as long as we cannot determine without doubt the identity of the victim or the deceased.

I would like to say that a crime has been committed in Malaysia and we also realize that the material used is a very dangerous chemical substance that should not be used at all, because if used in large quantities, it will lead to the deaths of many, not just one person.

So we must take a serious stand and we are fully determined to get to the truth and prosecute those responsible for what happened.

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