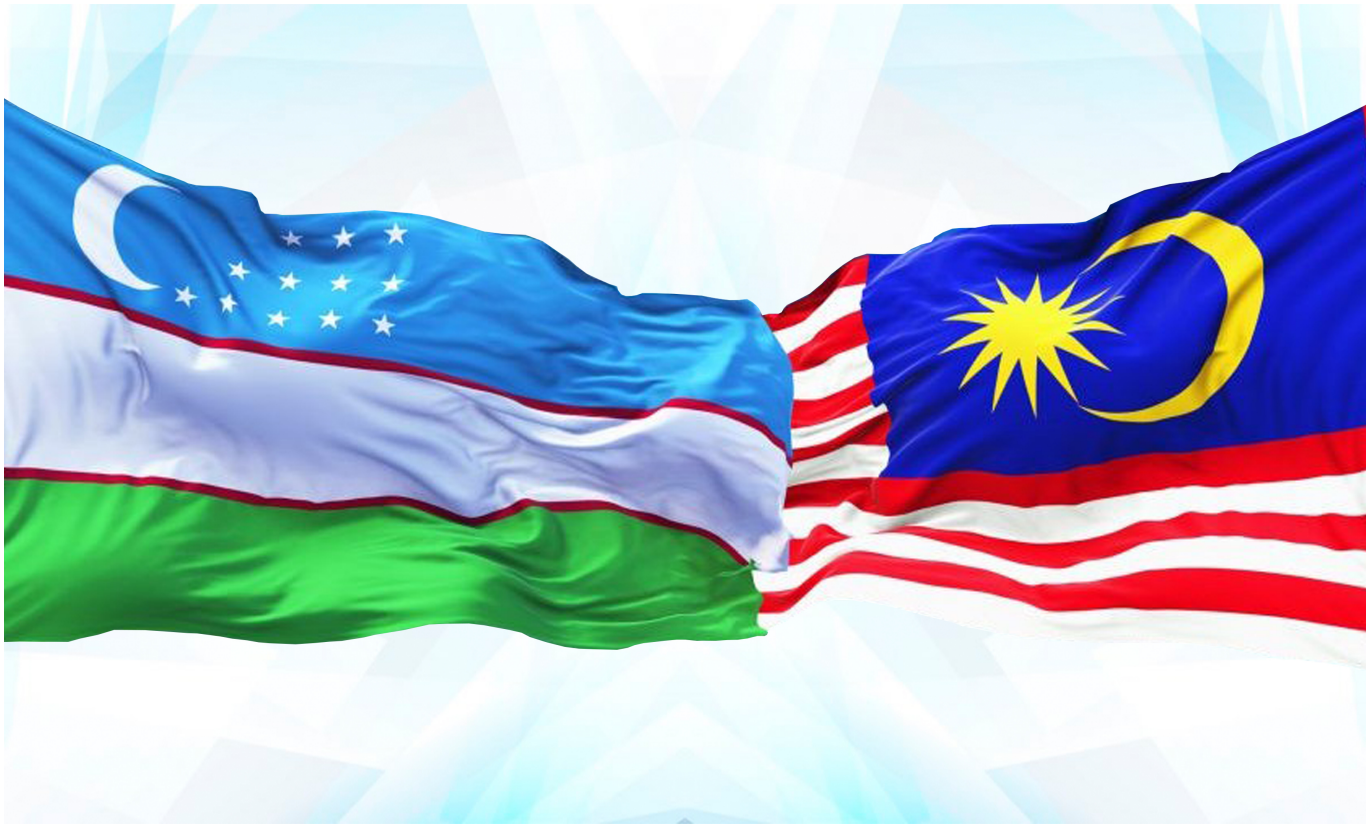
Malaysia-Uzbekistan: Upon the 29th Anniversary of Bilateral Relations and Diplomatic Ties between Malaysia & Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan and Malaysia bilateral relations have continued to prosper for over two decades now. The strong relationship and diplomatic ties between both countries will continue to solidify as Uzbekistan and Malaysia celebrates its 29th anniversary of diplomatic and bilateral relations, built on the foundation of mutual respect, peace, and shared prosperity.

Both Malaysia and Uzbekistan have commenced various degrees of agreement and cooperation especially at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak that began early last year. Cooperation and coordination between both countries are seen as strong footholds in various sectors such as politics, economics and trade, tourism and education.

With regards to political cooperation, multiple official visits at high-contact levels have been approached by both sides. Beginning in 1992, the late President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov paid a visit to Malaysia to discuss mutually beneficial cooperation between both countries, which was later reciprocated the following year by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad's, then Prime Minister of Malaysia's visit to Uzbekistan. The relationship even progressed even further, involving official royal visits from Malaysian royalties, especially in 2005 when His Majesty Tunku Syed Sijaruddin Syed Putra Jamallulail paid a visit to Uzbekistan. Ever since the establishment of bilateral relations in 1992, foreign dignitaries, diplomats, as well as royals have made official high-contact levels to strengthen bilateral relations on both sides.

It is also worth noting that Uzbekistan and Malaysia both played a huge role in cooperation at various other levels, such as with Uzbekistan's participation during the 32nd Asia-Pacific Roundtable (*titled: "Disruption: People, Technology, Power and Security")* held by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia and during the Kuala Lumpur Summit (KL Summit) in 2009. The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is seen not to have diminish nor deterred both Malaysia and Uzbekistan's diplomatic ties but rather have heightened relations in terms of continued online contacts between officials on both sides. This was seen during the online conference being held by ISIS Malaysia and the Institute of Strategic and Interregional Studies (ISRS) Uzbekistan which mutually benefited from the discourse on strengthening prospective

bilateral cooperation post-COVID19.

Uzbekistan continues to become Malaysia's strategic economic and trade counterpart in Central Asia, with trade surmounting up to $76 million in the year 2020 alone (this figure does not include Uzbekistan export which totalled up to $11.6 million USD last year). Malaysia and Uzbekistan established the Uzbek-Malaysia Joint Trade Committee in 2005, which formed the Malaysia-Uzbekistan Business Council under its scope, upon the launch of MATRADE's office in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and the virtual conference held between the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Trade and Investments of Uzbekistan H.E. Dr. Sardov Umurzakov and the Minister of International Trade and Investments of Malaysia, Y.B Dato' Seri Azmin Ali to further enhance economic and trade relations.

The most cooperative form of diplomacy that both Malaysia and Uzbekistan holds can be seen through its tourism and education sector. Currently, there are approximately 200 students from Uzbekistan that are enrolled in Malaysia's top-tier universities and educational institutions. Multiple institutions between both sides have agreed upon heightening cooperative measures in terms of the educational role of Uzbekistan and Malaysia's youth population.

The tourism sector is the most vital aspect to relations between both sides. Various institutions, agencies and ministries have sealed agreements of understanding to continuously increase efforts in establishing diplomacy in the tourism sector. The role of both embassies and diplomats on both sides continuously engages with one another, especially at the height of the
COVID-19 pandemic outbreak which had caused massive damage to the global tourism industries. On 30 November 2020 the Embassy of Uzbekistan organized a video conference between Deputy Chairman of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development H.E. Mr. Ulugbek Azamov and Secretary General of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia H.E. Dato' Dr. Noor Zari Hamat on exchanging measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and experience in increasing tourist attractiveness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to bear negative effects on diplomatic relations globally, but Malaysia and Uzbekistan remain resilient and robust amidst these challenging times. It will only suffice to continue these standards of ethical diplomacy between both Malaysia and Uzbekistan as we celebrate the 29th anniversary of diplomatic relations between one and another. Malaysia remains Uzbekistan's important and strategic ally in Southeast Asia.

Likewise, Uzbekistan is too, an ally and strategic partner for Malaysia in Central Asia. As both sides navigate the impact and consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains relevant to continue to count on one another to uplift the global standards, moving forward in a post-pandemic landscape.

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