



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
(ISIS) MALAYSIA

# Case for deeper Malaysia–Central Asia engagement

Structural complementarities, untapped potential  
in era of geoeconomic realignment

## Research note

---

**By**

Qarrem Kassim

**Foreword by**

Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah

## ISIS Malaysia

The Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983 with a mandate to advance Malaysia's strategic interests. As an autonomous research organisation, we focus on foreign policy and security; economics and trade; social policy and nation-building; technology and cyber; and climate and energy.

We actively conduct track-two diplomacy, promoting the exchange of views and opinions at the national and international levels. We also play a role in fostering closer regional integration and international cooperation through various forums, such as the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, ASEAN Institutes of Strategic & International Studies network, Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, Network of East Asian Think-Tanks, Network of ASEAN-China Think-Tanks and ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Dialogue.

## Contributor

**Qarrem Kassim** is an analyst with the Economics, Trade and Regional Integration programme. His work focuses on the geoeconomics of critical minerals, industrial policy related to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and public sector advisory.

© ISIS Malaysia 2026

*All rights reserved. This paper, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission from the publisher.*

## Foreword

Regions, like ideas, often lie dormant until history compels their rediscovery. Central Asia is one such region, long perceived as peripheral and distant, yet now re-emerging at the crossroads of a shifting global geoeconomic order.

For Malaysia, this moment invites both reflection and resolve. While trade linkages with the Central Asian republics remain modest, the region's strategic significance is increasingly difficult to ignore. Rich in energy and critical mineral reserves while situated along emerging Asia-Europe trade corridors, Central Asia is not simply a frontier market, it is a theatre where connectivity, resources and influence converge. Recent disruptions to global trade and energy routes have only accelerated this realisation, compelling nations to rethink the architecture of supply chains and the geography of economic resilience.

Yet, to view Central Asia solely through a geostrategic lens is to miss a deeper truth. It is often said that while Islam was born in Mecca, its intellectual and scholarly traditions were refined in Central Asia. From the works of Imam Al-Bukhari to the philosophical legacy of Al Ghazali, the region has long stood as a crucible of knowledge, inquiry and civilisational exchange. These shared inheritances remind us that engagement need not begin from unfamiliarity but from a foundation of historical and cultural affinity: one that continues to offer pathways in education, heritage and people-to-people connection.

The question before us, then, is not whether Central Asia matters, but whether Malaysia is prepared to engage with the region with clarity, continuity and purpose. For too long, engagement has been episodic, defined by memoranda, high-level dialogues and intent rather than sustained strategy. In an era marked by fragmentation and competition, this approach is no longer sufficient.

This research note aims to create the foundation for a structured assessment of Malaysia-Central Asia economic relations, identifying the constraints that have limited integration and the opportunities that lie ahead. More importantly, it proposes a pathway towards a more deliberate and enduring engagement, one that recognises Central Asia, not as a distant frontier, but as part of a wider geoeconomic reconfiguration.

As the famed theologian, Al Ghazali reminds: "Those who seek seashells will find seashells, those who open them will find pearls." In many ways, Central Asia presents such a scenario. An opportunity not simply to expand outwards, but to rediscover connections that have long existed beneath the surface. The task now is not merely to recognise this potential but to act upon it with lucidity and sustained bilateral commitment.

**Datuk Prof Dr Mohd Faiz Abdullah**

Executive Chairman

Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

## Executive summary

- **Malaysia's push for economic diversification amid global geopolitical and trade uncertainty has increasingly extended to Central Asia.** While often treated as a single region, the five Central Asian republics exhibit varying degrees of economic openness and external engagement. Nevertheless, a broader regional trend towards diversification of partnerships is increasingly evident, driven by a desire for wider engagement, agency and reduced dependence on major traditional trade partners. Despite existing cultural complementarities and ongoing diplomatic efforts, Malaysia-Central Asia trade and investment relations remain underdeveloped, accounting for 0.04% of the former's total trade in 2024. This paper argues that structural complementarities, coupled with shifting geoeconomic conditions, present a strategic window for deeper engagement.
- **Malaysia's trade with the region grew to RM1.14 billion in 2024, a 56% increase over five years but remains modest in scale and is highly skewed (94%) towards exports.** Bilateral trade is dominated by Malaysian exports of electronics, palm oil, and agro-food processing, while overall imports from Central Asia are concentrated around minerals, raw materials and fertilisers, making the latter prone to supply and availability swings, limiting the potential to anchor trade relations in stable long-term bilateral trade arrangements.
- **Few private sector links between Malaysian and Central Asian firms mean that Malaysia's comparative advantages remain underutilised in the region.** Policy uncertainty, non-harmonised regional trade frameworks, logistical challenges and concerns over institutional independence are several factors that heighten trade and investment risks.
- **There may be strong potential for sectoral trade in electronics, vegetable oils and fats, fertilisers, copper, zinc and other industrial goods.** Malaysia's cooperation with the region can evolve from a market for electronics, palm oil and extractive mining towards joint value-added development through mineral processing, halal logistics and supporting the region's development of digital services.
- **There is space for educational, vocational and technical training partnerships with private education providers,** including joint university exchanges, positioning Malaysia as a key development partner in the region.
- **Establishing formalised G2G and B2B cooperation while securing mutual recognition on halal, food safety and customs regulations will greatly help economic engagement** in the region and institutionalise business-to-business partnerships to promote diversified, long-term investment.

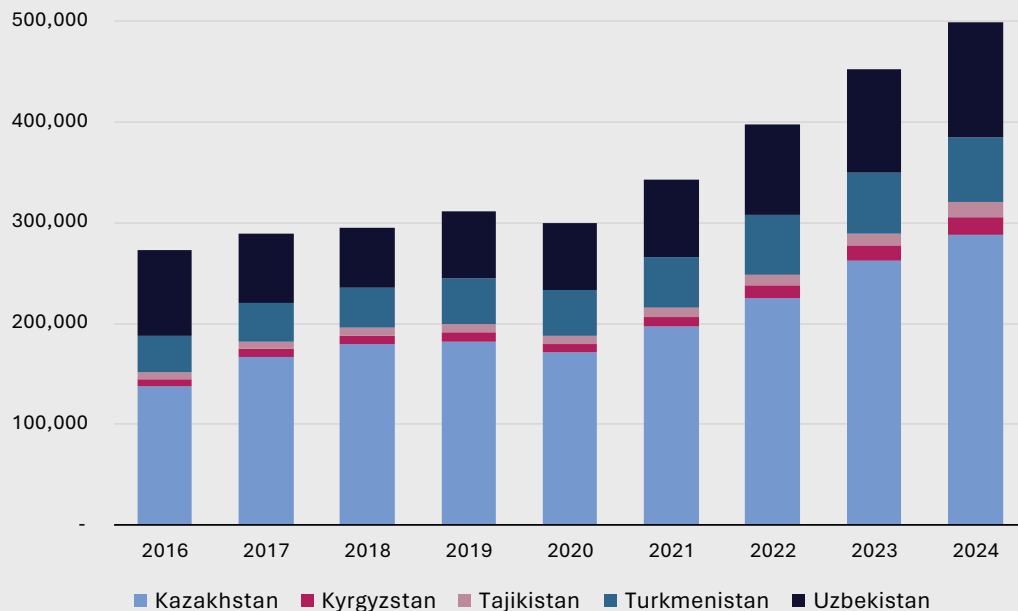
## 1.0 Background and introduction

Intensifying United States-China trade and geopolitical tensions, coupled with the unpredictability of trade patterns exemplified under President Donald Trump’s tariff actions, have highlighted the risk of overdependence on major powers. For Malaysia’s export-oriented economy, such vulnerabilities have reinvigorated calls for a pivot towards non-traditional markets. In this context, Central Asian engagement offers opportunities to pursue diversification and geoeconomic agency. Amid global pressures, it is imperative to unlock new markets for key commodities, with growing potential for palm oil, electronic goods and financial services.<sup>1</sup> Within this strategic calculus, Central Asia emerges as a region of trade and investor interest.

The countries of Central Asia, comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (the “C5”) are undergoing a process of reorientation since the Ukraine conflict. Historically bound through deep-rooted logistical, economic and security ties to Russia, the region is now seeking to widen its global engagement strategy to enhance regional strategic autonomy.<sup>2</sup> Economically, the GDP of the C5 grew by a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.9% since 2016, according to World Bank data, largely driven by continuing market liberalisation policies and industrial capacity growth in the mining and natural resources sector towards Europe (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1. C5 economic growth post-2020 driven by geopolitical disruption in Europe**

GDP of the C5 in US\$ (millions)



Source: World Bank Open Data (latest data up to 2024)

Recent geopolitical developments, particularly energy disruptions arising from conflicts in the Middle East, have reinforced the value of alternative trade and energy corridors linking Asia and Europe. The growing relevance of trans-Caspian routes through Central Asia highlights the region's evolving role in enhancing global supply chain resilience. In this vein, Malaysia's engagement with the C5 should also be viewed as part of a broader geoeconomic strategy.

Central Asia's strategic relevance is shaped by three converging dynamics: 1) resource endowment; 2) role in emerging Eurasian connectivity corridors; and 3) ongoing efforts to diversify economic partnerships beyond traditional trading partners.

This view is relevant in the context of heightened global fragmentation, where both Malaysia and C5 seek to widen engagement and reduce single-nation overdependence. This research note evaluates the structural constraints and opportunities shaping bilateral economic integration, while identifying pathways to integration. The recommendations here draw on global value chain theory, emphasising Malaysian involvement in C5 value chains and the complementary nature of Malaysia-C5 trade. This framework enables the identification of sector opportunities through joint ventures, processing and services integration.

## 2.0 Economics, trade and investment

Despite growing diplomatic engagement, economic integration has historically remained an underdeveloped pillar of Malaysia-C5 engagement. Nevertheless, despite bilateral trade remaining well below potential, efforts to enhance bilateral economic relations are gradually increasing.<sup>3,4,5</sup> In Kazakhstan, for instance, Malaysian halal products and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) have expanded notably while Malaysia has expressed strong investment interest in the region's resource wealth and agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1 Understanding overall trade landscape

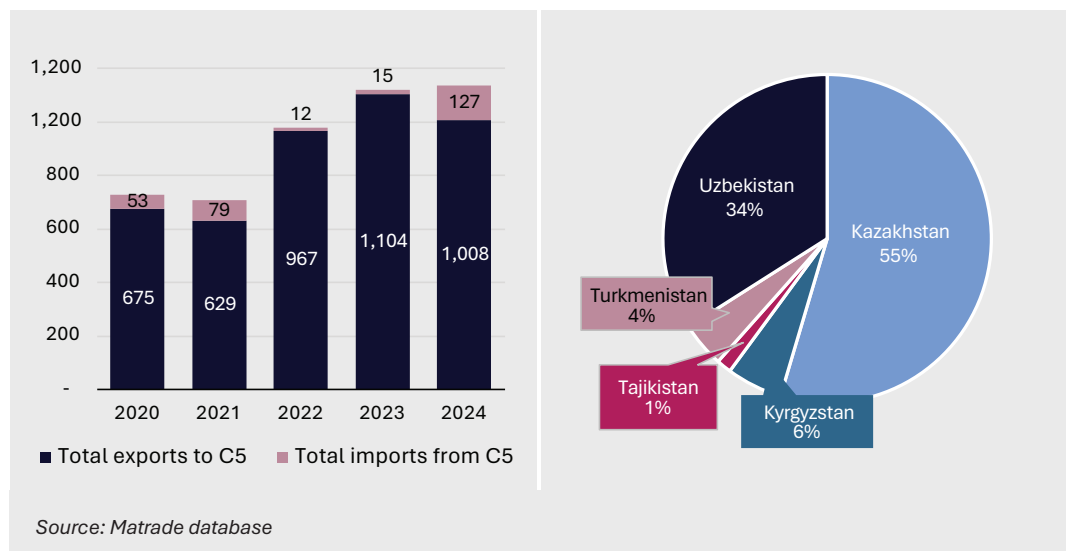
In 2024, Malaysia's total trade with the C5 nations reached RM1.14 billion – the highest on record, with exports amounting to RM1 billion and imports totalling RM127 million. This reflects a 56% increase in total trade over the past five years, corresponding to a CAGR of 9.3%, slightly below Malaysia's average total trade growth of 10% during the same period. In relative terms however, Malaysia's overall trade with Central Asia has declined as a share of its total trade portfolio, declining by 3.4% over the five-year period. Further, averaged trade with the C5 accounted for only 0.04% of Malaysia's total annual trade (Appendix II). Taken together, this suggests trade expansion had been incremental rather than structural, reflecting weak regional trade and supply chain integration (Fig. 2).

#### Fig. 2. Malaysia's trade with C5 dominated by exports, low imports

Malaysia's export and import with C5, RM (millions)

#### Fig. 3. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are largest players

Share (%) of Malaysia's total trade with C5



## 2.2 Nature of goods in trade flows

Trade data indicate that bilateral growth trends between Malaysia and Central Asia remain uneven and sporadic across countries and years, revealing the underdeveloped and ad hoc nature of trade and economic ties between both sides. It should be noted, however, that because of the landlocked geography of Central Asia, sea-borne trade could have taken place through ports in Pakistan or China but because there is no visibility on third-party destination, official trade statistics may understate the full picture. Nevertheless, for the purposes of preliminary research, this analysis covers only macro-level trade statistics.

**Fig. 4. Malaysia’s imports from Central Asia centre on upstream, extractive economic sectors**

Breakdown of top three major trade items between Malaysia and the countries of Central Asia (averaged over the past five years), share (%) of C5 country export and import

Country	Exports to Malaysia	Imports from Malaysia
Kazakhstan	Unwrought lead (79.7%) Unwrought zinc (5.3%) Aircraft parts (4.0%)	Laptops, computer parts (17.8%) Extracts of coffee or tea (15.4%) Electrical machinery (11.4%)
Uzbekistan	Mineral or chemical fertiliser (52.2%) Potassic fertiliser (18.6%) Nitrogenous fertiliser (17.7%)	Palm oil (25.1%) Extracts of coffee or tea (17.0%) Animal/ vegetable oils (16.0%)

Kyrgyzstan	Inorganic salts (43.9%) Integrated circuits (28.1%) Survey equipment (7.5%)	Machines and appliances (45.2%) Laptops, computer parts (16.6%) Electric batteries (8.0%)
Tajikistan	Electric water storage and heaters (45.6%) Beauty skincare (13.6%) Unspecified imports (6.3%)	Soaps and organic ingredients (40.4%) Unused postage, banknotes (35.0%) Coconut, palm kernel oils (7.3%)
Turkmenistan	Alcohol, spirits, liqueurs (70.6%) centrifuges (17.2%) Unspecified imports (2.7%)	Extracts of coffee or tea (64.3%) Palm oil (6.2%) Animal and vegetable oils (5.5%)

Source: Matrade database

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan dominate Malaysia-C5 trade, accounting for 87% of total trade value. They are likewise relatively stable and predictable, reflecting larger and more diversified consumption baskets. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan contribute 7% of total trade, marked by significant volatility both in trade value and composition. This divergence suggests Malaysia's engagement with C5 cannot be based on a uniform strategy and instead requires country-specific approaches and interests.

Trade is highly asymmetric in direction. Malaysian exports accounted for 94% of total bilateral trade value, supporting the view that Malaysian firms consider Central Asia as an export destination rather than an integrated value chain partner. This also indicates a severe lack of integrated value chains, notably in primary sectors, extraction and mineral processing (Appendix I).

### Fig. 5. Malaysia's imports from Central Asia exhibit highly sporadic patterns

Top five imports (4-digit HS code), 2020-24 (RM, millions, share of total Central Asia imports)

2020		2022		2024	
Potassic fertiliser (3104)	40.4%	Nitrogenous fertilisers (3102)	25.8%	Unwrought lead (7801)	82.4%
Mineral or chemical fertilisers (3105)	23.7%	Chromium oxides (2819)	18.3%	Electric capacitors (8532)	2.9%

Unwrought lead (7801)	16.9%	Unwrought zinc (7901)	11.8%	Inorganic salts (2825)	2.8%
Aircraft parts (8803)	9.0%	Oxo-metallic salts (2841)	6.3%	Nitrogenous fertilisers (3102)	2.0%
Nitrogenous fertilisers (3102)	3.1%	Aircraft parts (8803)	5.7%	Unwrought zinc (7901)	2.0%

Source: Matrade database

### Fig. 6. Malaysia's exports to Central Asia are generally diversified

Top five exports (4-digit HS code), 2020-24 (RM, millions, share of total Central Asia exports)

2020		2022		2024	
Computers, laptops (8471)	21.5%	Machines and appliances (8543)	15.8%	Coffee and tea extracts (2101)	23.7%
Coffee and tea extracts (2101)	17.7%	Animal and vegetable fats and oils (1516)	14.3%	Computers, laptops (8471)	13.9%
Palm oil (1511)	14.4%	Electric appliances (8516)	13.6%	Palm oil (1511)	13.3%
Animal & vegetable fats and oils (1516)	8.4%	Palm oil (1511)	12.9%	Margarines, edible fats and oils (1517)	5.5%
Margarines, edible fats and oils (1517)	5.8%	Coffee and tea extracts (2101)	10.9%	Animal and vegetable fats and oils (1516)	4.8%

Source: Matrade database

While Malaysia's exports are relatively diversified in downstream and intermediate goods, key exports from Central Asia concentrate around a narrow range of raw materials and upstream inputs (Fig. 5), further evidencing the extraction-sector nature among the latter's economies. Imports from the Central Asian region are largely sporadic, with large year-on-year (YoY) fluctuations in Malaysia's import basket, suggesting underutilisation of long-term supply chain contracts and formal cooperation structures.

The data reinforce an underlying asymmetry, one in which C5 sells primary goods to Malaysia, while Malaysia sells a range of value-added and consumer products. The result is a complementary albeit imbalanced trade relationship. The presence of intermediate industry goods and fertilisers indicates joint potential in agriculture, mineral and chemical sectors, as well as strategic long-term upstream sourcing opportunities amid diversifying global supply chains (Appendix I).

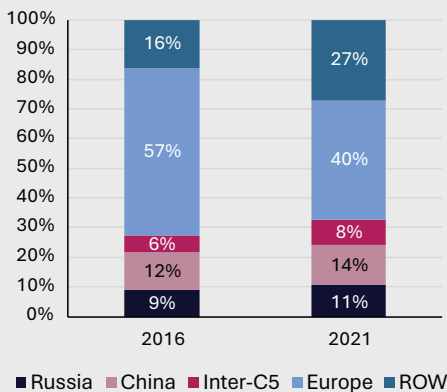
### 2.3 International trade relations of Malaysia and Central Asia

Bilateral trends were also non-optimal due to diverging export market priorities. Data indicate that Malaysia intensified its economic relations with its traditional partners, namely with ASEAN, China and the US, driven by a combination of regional integration opportunities, supply chain alignment and free trade agreements, such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership.<sup>7,8</sup>

Meanwhile, C5 economies depend on a bound set of partners and products. C5 had deepened its primary trade links with China, Russia, Europe and inter-regional partners, reflecting geographic and logistical realities.<sup>9</sup> Central Asia’s relatively integrated transport and trade corridors linking the region to Europe, Russia and China, such as the Northern and Middle Corridor Link) supports East-West connectivity while deprioritising southward trade pathways, indicating that maritime connectivity constraints act as a key barrier to deeper Malaysia-Central Asia integration.<sup>10,11</sup> Nevertheless, recent conflicts in the Middle East emphasised the view that diversifying alternative Eurasian and trans-Caspian corridors through Central Asia is becoming increasingly relevant for global trade and logistics.<sup>12</sup>

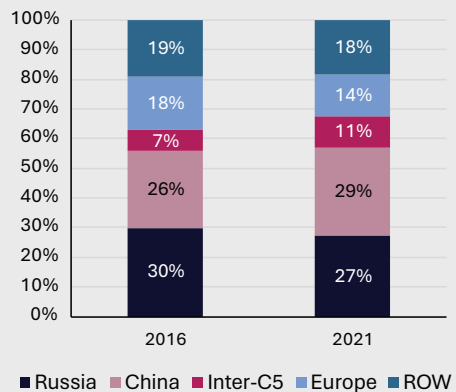
**Fig. 7. C5 exports have diversified beyond traditional trading partners (China, Russia and Europe)**

Share (%) of exports from C5 to trade partners



**Fig. 8. C5’s import reliance on China, Russia and inter-regionally**

Share (%) of imports to C5 from trade partners



\*Note: Turkmenistan was excluded due to insufficient data.

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity, World Bank database, OECD, author’s calculations

## 2.4 Overview of tariffs and non-tariff barriers

Generally, Central Asian economies remain comparatively low in trade openness (Fig. 9) compared to Malaysia. As Central Asian economies emerged from the former Soviet Union with a legacy of economic self-dependency, transitioning from a state-led model hindered the early development of long-term supply chains and investment linkages with non-traditional markets.

### Fig. 9. Average tariffs across Central Asia only slightly higher than Malaysia's but barriers to doing business remain high

Comparison of average tariffs of Malaysia and Central Asia

Country	Simple average tariff rate (%)	Trade openness* (%)	Cross-border trade global ranking+ (2020)
Malaysia	4.4%	132.1%	49
Kazakhstan	4.6%	61.8%	105
Uzbekistan	4.9%	64.4%	152
Tajikistan	6.5%	65.4%	141
Kyrgyzstan	4.7%	140.2%	89
Turkmenistan	N/A	34.1%	N/A

Source: World Integrated Trade Systems database, World Bank Ease of Doing Business Report (2020)

\*Note: trade openness is derived from adding both exports and imports divided by total GDP.

+ Note: cross-border trade rank is based on ease of trade across borders, a lower number indicates better ease-of-trading performance.

While average tariffs across Central Asia are only marginally higher than Malaysia, trade (% of GDP) remains significantly less prominent, except in Kyrgyzstan. This feature may also reflect the prevalence of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) in C5 economies, which often act as more challenging obstacles than tariffs. Nevertheless, the prevalence and intensity of NTBs vary across countries, with Kazakhstan generally having more open systems relative to its peers. Further, while most C5 members are also Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) members, ensuring a common market, country-level NTBs involving customs procedures, enforcement, certification and opaque licensing may hinder full trade optimisation.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, a key limiting factor is the absence of a harmonised, formal free trade agreement between Malaysia and C5. While several bilateral investment treaties (BITs) were signed in the 1990s with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (the last two signed but not in force), these agreements are dated, limited in scope and centred primarily on investor protections and dispute settlement rather than facilitating trade and economic cooperation in emerging sectors, such as digital economy, renewable energy and high-value industrial integration.<sup>14</sup>

Without renewed trade arrangements or institutional mechanisms that mirror contemporary customs harmonisation, regulatory and investment facilitation, Malaysia-C5 trade lacks predictability and long-term incentive. Consequently, Malaysian investors continue to face non-fiscal barriers in integrating shared supply chains and markets. The absence of a “living” bilateral trade framework also limits major opportunities in sectoral partnerships in halal food processing, Islamic finance and digital services trade.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.0 Challenges impeding economic integration**

Malaysia’s economic engagement with C5 remains limited despite promising complementarities and formal expressions of interest through myriad bilateral MoUs. Structural challenges in Central Asia, compounded by geography, institutional uncertainty and limited logistical options, continue to hold back long-term trade opportunities even within in-demand sectors. These are several key region-wide weaknesses that hinder Malaysia-C5 economic engagement.

#### **3.1 Limited cross-border cooperation, ambiguous legislation**

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there is considerable heterogeneity among C5 in regulatory documentation and information availability, with Kazakhstan automating trade and investment procedures since 2017 while Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan showed little to no progress.<sup>16</sup> OECD trade facilitation indicators continue to highlight major inter-C5 gaps in administrative policy, particularly in cross-border agency cooperation, permits, licences and legal procedures, limiting the appeal of regional market access. Moreover, weak agency coordination within and between C5 countries has led to regulatory contradictions and delays, requiring firms to engage with multiple agencies to fulfil procedures.<sup>17</sup>

OECD adds that although Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have largely liberalised their investment laws, implementation remains bureaucratic and opaque, particularly at the sub-national level. The risk of regulatory changes via top-down decree is still present and done with limited public consultation.<sup>18</sup> For Malaysian firms, especially those operating through local partners and agents, this environment implies regulatory risk, requiring local brokers to facilitate investment activity, resulting in Malaysians underutilising core comparative advantages. Further, despite the increasing use of digital systems, trade documents are complex and require original physical copies in some C5 nations, hampering seamless trade.<sup>19</sup> This is exacerbated by inadequate integrated systems for border management and digital certification.<sup>20</sup> Such challenges limit the appeal of regionalised market access despite EAEU membership.

#### **3.2 Digital automation of trade procedures**

Digital trade facilitation and physical connectivity remain a structural barrier in deepening trade and investment ties. While Malaysia has made considerable advances in integrating trade and logistics within ASEAN, C5 economies generally lag in integrating regional process automation and digital systems.<sup>21</sup> Paper-based systems remain commonplace in the region, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, scoring well below global averages in key OECD trade facilitation indicators in automation and “single-window systems”, increasing costs and delays. While Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have introduced e-declaration systems (such as the

Astana-1 system) and customs management tools, gaps remain in implementation. Cases were reported of hard-copy documents still being required at checkpoints, increasing the risk of error, miscommunication or discretionary interpretation.<sup>22</sup> For Malaysian firms familiar with ASEAN single window (ASW) protocols, these challenges present a steep operational learning curve.

Logistical bottlenecks compound such shortcomings. All C5 nations lack direct access to maritime shipping lanes with Malaysia. As a result, containerised goods typically travel either through air cargo or multimodal routes through Pakistan or China, subjecting shipments to logistical delays, inefficiencies and vulnerability to disruption. For instance, the most affordable option in shipping from Malaysia to Kazakhstan via sea freight typically takes 30 days, while air cargo takes three to five days, at substantially higher cost.<sup>23</sup> Kazakhstan, with access to the Caspian Sea and Chinese rail systems (a key node in the Trans-Caspian Corridor) and Uzbekistan through its proximity with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are comparatively better connected than their regional peers.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, both nations suffer last-mile connectivity gaps, cold-storage logistics and warehouse capacity. These gaps are problematic for time-sensitive products, where consistent timely throughput is crucial.

### **3.3 Market access, uneven investment incentives**

Many C5 nations have undertaken market reforms over the past decade, with new laws promising, in principle, fair investor treatment, profit repatriation and tax incentives. Nevertheless, the implementation of fiscal incentives remains uneven. Investment incentives often target large-scale commitments, with fiscal stability and assurance clauses that favour major projects over modest commercial ventures.<sup>25,26</sup> This presents a structural disadvantage for smaller Malaysian firms, lacking the scale to qualify for preferential incentives. Consequently, smaller firms opt to engage with the region through direct exports than greenfield investments, limiting exposure and economic integration with the region.

There is also strong heterogeneity in institutional quality across C5. Judicial independence was reportedly inconsistent and contract enforcement may be vulnerable to administrative discretion. It should be noted that all C5 nations, except Kazakhstan, were listed as non-market economies by the US Commerce Department.<sup>27</sup> That said, historically, among C5, Kazakhstan and more recently, Uzbekistan have made the most progress in formalising investment protections, including special economic zones and fiscal incentives.

## **4.0 Recommendations**

### **4.1 Enhancing bilateral trade and investment agreements**

Following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's official visits to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in May 2024, the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry announced that Malaysia had, through bilateral MoUs, secured RM2.1 billion in potential trade in goods and services with the three nations, representing a near two-fold increase from total bilateral trade in 2023.<sup>28</sup> While no joint statement outlined explicit trade targets between Malaysia and C5, such agreements highlight the growing strategic importance of deepening trade and investment linkages as a core pillar of Malaysia's engagement with the C5 countries.

Research should prioritise assessing the implementation and effectiveness of existing MoUs and BITs. Existing BITs with the C5 are anchored in dated, narrow provisions, requiring updates, and while they remain relevant for risk mitigation, such BITs are structurally inadequate for supporting deeper forms of supply chain integration. They do not address market access, services liberalisation and regulatory cooperation faced by firms, particularly SMEs. As a result, the current architecture offers high-level investor protection without commercial momentum.

In this vein, future cooperation with Central Asia could be based on Singapore's engagement model with the region, which is relatively more contemporary and functional. The signing of the Eurasian Economic Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement in October 2019 and the Kazakhstan-Singapore Services and Investment Agreement in May 2023, which guarantees GATS-style treatment, including mode-of-supply commitments and market access obligations across selected professional sectors, such as finance, logistics, engineering and ICT services, could be used as a baseline for further bilateral cooperation. This also offers a far more effective mechanism than the existing BIT structure.

To operationalise this, technical sector scoping studies are vital. These should benchmark on existing Singapore-EAEU commitments, identify priority sectors and map relevant regulatory barriers across C5. Further, Malaysia should prioritise services and investment facilitation, rather than tariff liberalisation alone. Given governance hurdles and logistical constraints, the greatest gains are likely to come from regulatory cooperation, services and investment predictability. This should come complete with formal institutional mechanisms, such as G2G or B2B committees, to ensure that agreements are equipped to address the challenges firms face. In the Malaysian context, this could include exploring expansion of the mutual recognition agreement (MRA) with Kazakhstan in halal certification (signed in May 2024) to other C5 states, standards for sanitary and phytosanitary requirements among other regulations.<sup>29</sup>

At present, most arrangements are anchored in ad hoc MoUs or investment pledges led by both state-sponsored vehicles and large private sector players. While important, greater emphasis is needed to promote direct commercial ties between mid-sized private players on both sides, including through structured public-private partnerships, long-term supply contracts and co-investment opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

One practical short-term consideration is to leverage on the Malaysia-Central Asia Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group (IPFG), currently led on the Senate side by Senator Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohammad, as a platform to convene country-tailored bilateral business dialogues through the respective chambers of commerce. Such engagement could be coordinated through Malaysian business associations, such as National Chamber of Commerce & Industry of Malaysia, in collaboration with the respective national chambers of commerce, such as the Malaysia-Kazakhstan and Malaysia-Uzbekistan Business Councils. While IPFG is primarily designed to promote legislative diplomacy, it may also serve as a convening platform for private sector engagement during diplomatic exchanges.

Such dialogues could form the basis for ad hoc working groups to raise practical regulatory issues, which could then be channelled to relevant ministries. This mechanism could also help track the implementation of existing G2G and B2B MoUs, which stakeholders note remain underutilised. Over time, this could involve facilitating sector-specific business dialogues, encourage long-term contracts and identify co-investment opportunities. Beyond cross-

border investment, this committee would play a key role in raising awareness of licensing frameworks, standards, incentives and development priorities, providing Malaysian exporters and investors with more nuanced understanding of the region's diverse institutional and regulatory landscape.

## 4.2 Playing to individual strengths

While Malaysia-Central Asia trade volumes remain modest, the region's long-term economic potential is increasingly attracting global attention, with a view towards strategic minerals. Central Asia houses significant deposits of strategic minerals and energy resources, including uranium, copper, zinc and rare earths, necessary for the green transition. For instance, Kazakhstan accounts for more than 40% of global uranium reserves and holds substantial deposits of copper and chromium, while Uzbekistan has globally significant reserves of copper and uranium, and is among the world's top five gold producers. The World Bank estimates that Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's combined subsoil mineral wealth may reach up to US\$50 trillion (RM200 trillion).<sup>31</sup>

As supply chains increasingly diversify, such resource endowments signal first-mover strategic potential in mineral refining and processing aimed at global supply chains. Mineral players in Central Asia may likewise benefit from the critical mineral MoUs signed between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with the US on 4 February 2026, signalling opportunities to benefit from American-backed capital investment.<sup>32</sup>

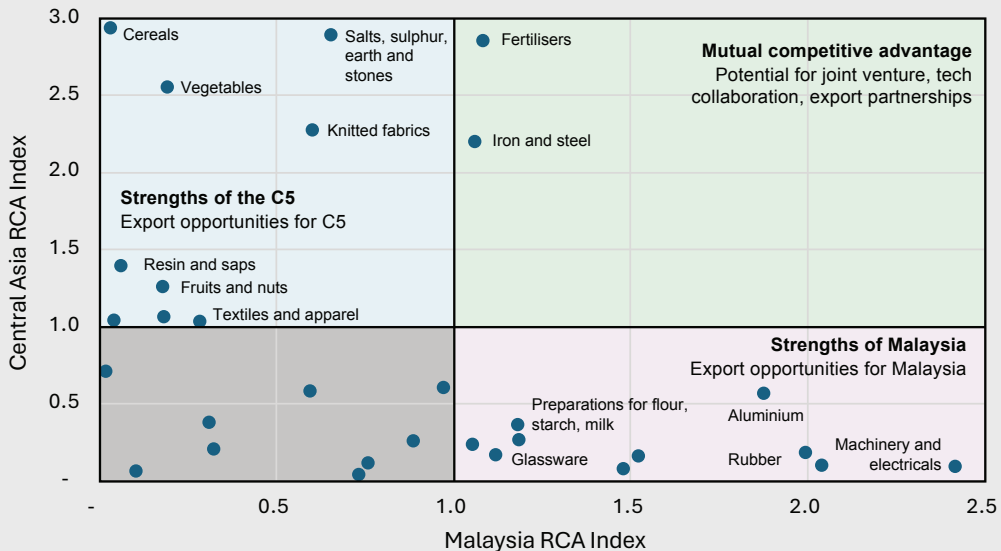
Beyond natural resources, C5 represents a combined market of 80 million people with a rapidly expanding Islamic economy, industrial and infrastructure development agendas. Major national development programmes, such as the Uzbekistan Strategy 2030, aim to strengthen domestic manufacturing, infrastructure and energy systems through encouraging foreign partnerships, generating demand for machinery, electronics, mineral processing and industrial inputs – areas where Malaysia already possess comparative advantage (Appendix I).

Lastly, Malaysia's engagement with Central Asia should also be approached geostrategically, considering evolving conditions in the Middle East. Recent disruptions have exposed long-held vulnerabilities in traditional shipping routes, especially those linked to key maritime chokepoints in the Middle East, including the Strait of Hormuz, Bab Al-Mandeb Strait and Suez Canal.<sup>33</sup> In response, alternative overland corridors in Eurasia, particularly trans-Caspian routes, are gaining renewed importance as countries seek to diversify shipping lanes and enhance resilience.<sup>34</sup>

Against this backdrop, the paper proposes a cooperation framework anchored in relative comparative advantages. This cooperation framework would ensure that bilateral trade strategies are driven by long-term competitiveness and complementarity, with the aim of identifying new growth areas. This research note employs the RCA index as a proxy for sectoral competitiveness. RCA is derived from the ratio of a country's export share in each sector relative to the global export share of that sector, where greater values indicate comparative strengths. It should be noted however, that while RCA analysis is useful for identifying broad sectoral strengths, it is inherently backward looking and does not account for industrial capacity, policy or firm-level competitiveness. It should also be noted that the analysis is conducted at the macro-sectoral level and does not account for third-country transshipment effects, which may distort actual trade linkages. However, these effects remain outside the scope of this study.

**Fig. 10. Bilateral trade strategies must consider Malaysia and Central Asia’s comparative advantage beyond commodities and primary goods**

Indices of Revealed Comparative Advantage by product, 2024



Source: Author’s calculation based on UN Comtrade (2024), World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS) database (2024), World Bank

Note: Central Asia’s RCA consists of consolidating data from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Trade data for Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were not available on the World Bank database.

RCA is calculated by dividing the share of a country’s total exports in a particular product/sector by the global share of exports in the same sector, serving as a proxy for its international competitiveness in the industry. A value above 1 indicates that the country has a comparative advantage in the sector’s exports while a value below 1 indicates a comparative disadvantage.

It should also be noted that the sectors highlighted above is non-exhaustive. A full list of HS codes (2-digit) and its RCA is provided in Appendix I.

The top left quadrant represents the sectors of comparative advantage for C5 that can enhance its exports. These include cereals, vegetables, fabrics, salts and sulphur. Further, there are RCA advantages for Central Asia not included in the above chart such as in silk (8.9), cotton (8.8), copper (5.3), zinc (9.2) and other base metals (3.0) (Appendix I), indicative of known advantages in primary and extractive sectors, representing viable export opportunities and long-term supply contracts in Malaysian and ASEAN markets.

The bottom right quadrant shows the sectors that Malaysia holds strong comparative advantages, namely in rubber, aluminium, vegetable oils and electronics and machinery, supporting the C5’s infrastructural, industrial and consumer needs. Of particular interest is the top right quadrant (highlighted in green), which identifies sectors that both sides have

strong comparative advantages, these represent sectors that may benefit from joint ventures, co-production agreements and third market commercial partnerships, notably in processing, mineral fuels and fertilisers. In this vein, the data strongly indicate supply chain integration and collaboration in copper, zinc and other critical minerals processing sectors.

Future research on Malaysia-C5 trade and investment potential should incorporate a reassessment of comparative advantage and sectoral complementarity at the country-level. For Malaysia, this means leveraging on its strengths in value-added processing and industrial capacity, while forging strategic partnerships in critical upstream supply chains. For the C5, it remains critical to transition beyond raw material exports through joint venture processing and regional supply chain integration. A comparative advantage-driven approach offers a structured pathway to deeper, more integrated, balanced and future-proofed economic ties between the two partners.

### **4.3 Educational, tourism and service sector cooperation**

The long-term sustainability of Malaysia-Central Asia economic engagement will increasingly depend on expanding cooperation beyond traditional goods trade towards the services sector. As C5 economies pursue industrial diversification and digital transformation strategies, demand for higher value services, such as in IT, education, digital finance and tourism, is expected to grow. For instance, Uzbekistan plans an ambitious goal in digital services, aiming to train one million coders, programmers and IT specialists by 2030, signalling a strategic shift towards its digital economy over extractive industries. Malaysia's matured service technology ecosystem could be well positioned to meet these emerging needs.<sup>35</sup>

Encouragingly, recent bilateral agreements suggest knowledge and services-led economic partnerships are increasingly feasible. A notable example is the Singapore-Kazakhstan Services and Investment Agreement, coming into force in March 2025. The agreement provides a framework to facilitate cross-border services trade and investment. The agreement covers 15 sectors, including, among others, financial, digital trade and professional business services, while including provisions aimed at improving regulatory transparency and encouraging investment flows in emerging sectors. For Malaysia, this could serve as a baseline for deeper and more structured economic cooperation focusing on Malaysia's comparative strengths in Islamic finance and other professional services. This would complement existing BITs by providing clearer regulatory frameworks for Malaysian firms operating in Central Asian markets while simultaneously encouraging Central Asian entry into Malaysia's services ecosystem.

Malaysia's soft power and institutional engagement in Central Asia already provide a strong foundation for further integration. Programmes include the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), that have contributed significantly to capacity-building across the region. As of 2024, the programme has trained more than 850 professionals from Uzbekistan's public sector agencies in Malaysian higher education institutions. In addition, a growing number of Central Asian students currently enrolled in Malaysian universities suggests familiarity and expanding cross-educational linkages.

There is considerable scope to expand structured university-level collaboration through joint research initiatives, dual-degree and student exchange initiatives with Central Asian universities. Such partnerships could focus on sectors aligned with regional economic

priorities, including green energy, IT and engineering. Expanded educational collaboration could further strengthen Malaysia's position as a regional knowledge and education provider.

Tourism represents another promising avenue for services-sector engagement. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have experienced rapid growth in tourism in recent years, supported by visa liberalisation policies and increased international promotion. However, direct flight connectivity between Central Asia and Malaysia remains limited. Strengthening air connectivity through partnerships between Malaysian and Central Asian carriers could significantly reduce these barriers, potentially positioning Malaysia as a transit hub connecting tourists from Central Asia with the broader ASEAN region.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Malaysia's mutual outreach to Central Asia comes at a time when traditional partnerships are being diversified. Both regions face similar imperatives – to diversify trade and shipping lanes, reduce overdependence, and assert agency in a multipolar world. This research note aims to highlight complementary industrial capacities and shared economic interests, especially in value-added manufacturing sectors, halal agro-processing and education, among others.

Yet, current underdevelopment of trade relations and persistent structural bottlenecks remains challenging, stifling deeper economic integration. Overcoming such challenges requires a pivot towards coordinated, rules-based and cross-sectoral frameworks and collaboration. In this vein, both sides should consider advocating for more formalised trade and economic partnerships, not only bilaterally but from the perspective of regional blocs. For Malaysia to fully acknowledge the potential of C5 engagement, it must treat this endeavour not as peripheral diplomacy but as part of a core component of its diversification strategy. This includes leveraging on strengths in education, manufacturing and the digital trade, services and halal, while supporting Central Asia's need for deeper connectivity, industrial upgrading and human capital development.

In a time marked by geostrategic uncertainty, Central Asian economic integration should no longer be seen as a distant and indistinctive frontier, but as a partner in Malaysia's Global South diversification strategy. The potential and opportunities are real, but likewise is the need for targeted, deliberate and sustained engagement.

## Appendix I: RCA between Malaysia and Central Asia based on HS Code (2-digit)

Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) Index for Malaysia and Central Asia as of 2024. The table below highlights in green any RCA above the threshold indicator of 1. It should be noted that data for Central Asia trade were not available for Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

HS Code	Category	Malaysia RCA	C5 RCA
1	Live animals	0.5953	0.5879
2	Meat and edible meat offal	0.0175	0.2352
3	Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	0.3024	0.1495
4	Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey	0.3645	0.2798
5	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified	0.0417	1.0408
6	Live trees and other plants; bulbs, roots and the like	0.2925	0.1184
7	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	0.1915	2.5531
8	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus/melons	0.1764	1.2582
9	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	0.1590	0.1585
10	Cereals	0.0288	2.9392
11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin	0.2615	7.0154
12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains	0.0179	0.7120
13	Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps	0.0593	1.4007
14	Vegetable plaiting materials; other vegetable products	7.5416	0.5412
15	Animal or vegetable fats and oils	10.3367	0.7525
16	Preparations of meat, fish or crustaceans	0.3618	0.0551
17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	0.3225	0.2074
18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	3.0612	0.3122
19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk	1.1816	0.3687
20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts	0.1443	0.3289
21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	1.1849	0.2654
22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	0.2856	0.4333

HS Code	Category	Malaysia RCA	C5 RCA
23	Residues and waste from food industries; prepared animal feed	0.4711	0.5410
24	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes	0.1095	0.8326
25	Salt; sulphur; earths and stone; plastering materials	0.6516	2.8944
26	Ores, slag and ash	0.3962	3.3098
27	Mineral fuels, oils and petroleum products	1.7843	5.2730
28	Inorganic chemicals	0.5677	5.1588
29	Organic chemicals	0.7300	0.0402
30	Pharmaceutical products	0.0340	0.0167
31	Fertilisers	1.0831	2.8537
32	Tanning or dyeing extracts	0.6874	0.2774
33	Essential oils and resinoids; perfumery, cosmetics	0.2099	0.1022
34	Soap, organic surface-active agents	0.9453	0.2811
35	Albuminoidal substances; modified starches; glues	0.3126	0.1552
36	Explosives; pyrotechnic products	0.2700	0.1444
37	Photographic or cinematographic goods	0.5153	0.1320
38	Miscellaneous chemical products	1.5227	0.1601
39	Plastics and articles thereof	0.8858	0.2585
40	Rubber and articles thereof	1.9943	0.1854
41	Raw hides and skins (other than fur skins) and leather	0.0724	0.9044
42	Articles of leather; saddlery and travel goods	0.1028	0.0632
43	Fur skins and artificial fur; manufactures thereof	0.0356	0.2012
44	Wood and articles of wood	1.0514	0.2369
45	Cork and articles of cork	0.0242	0.0009
46	Manufactures of straw, esparto or other plaiting materials	0.0696	0.0028
47	Pulp of wood or other fibrous cellulosic material	0.7012	0.2004
48	Paper and paperboard; articles of paper pulp	0.7589	0.1206
49	Printed books, newspapers, pictures	0.4786	0.0648

HS Code	Category	Malaysia RCA	C5 RCA
50	Silk	0.0164	8.9323
51	Wool, fine or coarse animal hair	0.0255	0.1171
52	Cotton	0.3871	8.7748
53	Other vegetable textile fibres	0.0326	0.0992
54	Man-made filaments	0.3541	0.1157
55	Man-made staple fibres	0.6385	0.4578
56	Wadding, felt and nonwovens; yarns	0.3629	0.6610
57	Carpets and other textile floor coverings	0.0728	0.4419
58	Special woven fabrics; tufted textile fabrics	0.0835	0.5301
59	Impregnated, coated, covered or laminated textile fabrics	0.2475	0.0517
60	Knitted or crocheted fabrics	0.5997	2.2764
61	Articles of apparel and clothing, knitted or crocheted	0.2830	1.0327
62	Articles of apparel, not knitted or crocheted	0.0939	0.2558
63	Other made-up textile articles	0.1798	1.0676
64	Footwear, gaiters and the like	0.1139	0.3137
65	Headgear and parts thereof	0.3874	0.1202
66	Umbrellas, walking sticks, seat-sticks	0.0447	0.0091
67	Prepared feathers and articles made of feathers	0.0198	0.0205
68	Articles of stone, plaster, cement, asbestos, mica	0.9723	0.6041
69	Ceramic products	0.3088	0.3779
70	Glass and glassware	1.1199	0.1722
71	Natural or cultured pearls, precious stones	0.2942	3.7673
72	Iron and steel	1.0579	2.2039
73	Articles of iron or steel	0.4606	0.2046
74	Copper and articles thereof	0.9884	5.2691
75	Nickel and articles thereof	0.3138	0.1150
76	Aluminium and articles thereof	1.8740	0.5668

HS Code	Category	Malaysia RCA	C5 RCA
78	Lead and articles thereof	3.1200	3.4784
79	Zinc and articles thereof	0.9018	9.1533
80	Tin and articles thereof	7.8678	0.0024
81	Other base metals; cermet; articles thereof	0.4626	3.0225
82	Tools, implements, cutlery	0.1557	0.1982
83	Miscellaneous articles of base metal	0.3591	0.2017
84	Machinery and mechanical appliances	0.7851	0.1808
85	Electrical machinery and equipment	2.4158	0.0970
86	Railway or tramway locomotives	0.1693	0.6027
87	Vehicles other than railway or tramway stock	0.0758	0.1263
88	Aircraft, spacecraft and parts thereof	0.2865	0.1549
89	Ships, boats and floating structures	0.1835	0.0335
90	Optical, photographic, medical, surgical instruments	1.4777	0.0787
91	Clocks and watches and parts thereof	0.2871	0.0232
92	Musical instruments	2.0381	0.0994
93	Arms and ammunition	0.0042	0.0005
94	Furniture; bedding, mattresses, cushions	0.7196	0.0397
95	Toys, games and sports requisites	0.3822	0.0679
96	Miscellaneous manufactured articles	0.3156	0.0812
97	Works of art, collectors' pieces and antiques	0.0168	0.0057
99	Miscellaneous (special codes, temporary imports, etc)	0.1051	0.6173

## Appendix II: Breakdown of Malaysia-Central Asia trade

### Two-way trade is marked by sporadic flows

Malaysia's bilateral trade with Central Asia (RM, millions 2020-24)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	<b>450.2</b>	<b>407.5</b>	<b>572.9</b>	<b>474.5</b>	<b>643.7</b>
Exports to Malaysia	16.6	44.5	5.4	8.9	115.9
Imports from Malaysia	433.6	363.0	567.5	465.6	527.9
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>162.3</b>	<b>40.0</b>
Exports to Malaysia	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.2	5.7
Imports from Malaysia	4.6	10.2	38.6	161.1	34.3
<b>Tajikistan</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>11.5</b>
Exports to Malaysia	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1
Imports from Malaysia	6.1	31.7	10.5	8.2	11.4
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>70.0</b>
Exports to Malaysia	0.3	13.6	0.6	3.3	0.8
Imports from Malaysia	20.8	16.6	36.3	45.4	69.2
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	<b>245.8</b>	<b>227.3</b>	<b>319.0</b>	<b>426.1</b>	<b>369.8</b>
Exports to Malaysia	35.5	20.0	4.9	1.9	4.8
Imports from Malaysia	210.3	207.3	314.1	424.2	365.0
<b>Total Central Asia trade</b>	<b>728.1</b>	<b>707.4</b>	<b>978.8</b>	<b>1,119.7</b>	<b>1,135.1</b>
<b>Total Malaysia trade</b>	<b>1,784,308.1</b>	<b>2,228,366.1</b>	<b>2,843,820.7</b>	<b>2,637,242.7</b>	<b>2,878,525.8</b>
<b>Share of Malaysia trade</b>	<b>0.04%</b>	<b>0.03%</b>	<b>0.03%</b>	<b>0.04%</b>	<b>0.04%</b>

Source: Matrade database

Note: US\$1 is convertible to RM4.38 (average of 2020-24).

## End Notes

- 1 R. Hamzah. (24 June 2025) “Malaysia has strong potential to expand in Central Asia, with Uzbekistan as gateway – Fadillah”. *Bernama*. <https://bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2437948>
- 2 R. Pomfret. (27 December 2023). Central Asia’s gradual economic repositioning. *East Asia Forum*. <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/12/27/central-asias-gradual-economic-repositioning>
- 3 A. Sofiah. (20 May 2024). “Malaysia signs MOUs with Kazakhstan & Uzbekistan on training & education, R&D, and more”. *Humanresourcesonline.net*. <https://www.humanresourcesonline.net/malaysia-signs-mous-with-kazakhstan-uzbekistan-on-training-education-r-d-and-more>
- 4 Bernama. (May 2024). “Business community should explore new investments in Kazakhstan – PM” *MIDA*. <https://www.mida.gov.my/mida-news/business-community-should-explore-new-investments-in-kazakhstan-pm>
- 5 Dunyo IA. (25 June 2024). “Another Uzbekistan – Malaysia business forum convened in Tashkent”. *Dunyo Information Agency*. <https://dunyo.info/en/sotrudnichestvo/toshkent-sha%D2%B3rida-%D0%8Ezbeiston-malayziya-biznes-forumi-%D1%9Etkazildi>
- 6 MATRADE Webinar. (7 December 2023). “Export opportunities in Kazakhstan”. *Malaysia Business Group*. <https://www.malaysiabusinessgroup.com/news-insights/item/export-opportunities-in-kazakhstan>
- 7 Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2024). “Monthly External Trade Statistics, Malaysia”. [www.newss.statistics.gov.my](http://www.newss.statistics.gov.my)
- 8 J. Singh. C. Cheng. (May 2025). “Trump, trade and tariffs: impact on Malaysia”. *ISIS Malaysia Policy Brief*.
- 9 T, Mitrova. February 2024. “Russia expanding energy ties in Central Asia”. *Center on Global Energy Policy*. <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/russias-expanding-energy-ties-in-central-asia/>
- 10 Y. Sharifli. November 2024. “From disinterest to strategic priority: China’s changing approach to the middle corridor”. *Trends Research*. <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/from-disinterest-to-strategic-priority-chinas-changing-approach-to-the-middle-corridor/>
- 11 ESCAP. November 2024. “Connectivity, Sustainability, and Resilience of Freight Transport in South-East Asia and North and Central Asia”. *ESCAP*. <https://www.unescap.org/events/2024/connectivity-sustainability-and-resilience-freight-transport-south-east-asia-and-north#>
- 12 A. Frigerio. (30 March 2026). How the Iran War is reshaping Kazakhstan’s role in Eurasia. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2026/03/how-the-iran-war-is-reshaping-kazakhstans-role-in-eurasia/>
- 13 OECD (2023), Trade Facilitation in Central Asia, *OECD Publishing, Paris*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/80ed999c-en>
- 14 Investment Policy Hub. (2025). “*International Investment Agreements Navigator, Malaysia*”. UNCTAD.
- 15 V. Gomez. (27 September 2022). “Catalysing Malaysia’s Digital Economy”. *MDEC*. <https://mdec.my/esg-mdcap/content-hub/catalysing-malaysia-digital-economy>
- 16 OECD. (2023). Trade Facilitation in Central Asia, *OECD Publishing Paris*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/80ed999c-en>

- 17 Global Relations: Eurasia Competitiveness Programme. 2021. "Improving the Legal Environment for Business and Investment in Central Asia". *Central Asia Invest. OECD*.  
[https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/04/improving-the-legal-environment-for-business-and-investment-in-central-asia\\_8850d86b/d3d8daca-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/04/improving-the-legal-environment-for-business-and-investment-in-central-asia_8850d86b/d3d8daca-en.pdf)
- 18 A. Khudaykulov. (23 July 2024). Mapping institutional resilience: Locating regulatory growth frameworks in Central Asia. *The Political Economy of Central Asian Law*.  
[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-55341-7\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-55341-7_6)
- 19 S. Kumar. (2 June 2015). Post Accession "Maximizing the Benefits of WTO Membership and Global Economic Integration", Dushanbe, Tajikistan. *World Trade Organisation*  
[https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/acc\\_e/session1sarojkumarjha12stcenturysilkroad.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/session1sarojkumarjha12stcenturysilkroad.pdf)
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Central Asian Bureau of Analytical Reporting (CABAR). (Date Unknown). "The overview of national digitalisation strategies of Central Asian States: challenges and opportunities for development". CABAR. [https://cabar.asia/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Policy-Brief\\_Digitalization\\_en.pdf](https://cabar.asia/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Policy-Brief_Digitalization_en.pdf)
- 22 S. Toshniyozov. (December 2024). Issues and prospects of using electronic document circulation in the economy of Uzbekistan. *Tashkent State University of Economics*.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387080964\\_Issues\\_and\\_Prospects\\_of\\_Using\\_Electronic\\_Document\\_Circulation\\_in\\_the\\_Economy\\_of\\_Uzbekistan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387080964_Issues_and_Prospects_of_Using_Electronic_Document_Circulation_in_the_Economy_of_Uzbekistan)
- 23 Megaton Shipping. (2025) "Shipping from Malaysia to Kazakhstan". (Accessed 14th June 2025).  
<https://www.megaton.com.sg/shipping-from-malaysia-to-kazakhstan/>
- 24 C. Szumski. (17 June 2022). Kazakhstan key "middle corridor" linking China to EU. Euractiv.  
<https://www.euractiv.com/news/kazakhstan-key-middle-corridor-linking-china-to-eu/>
- 25 Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. (2024) "2024 Investment Climate Statements: Kazakhstan" *US Department of State*. (Accessed on 20th June 2025)  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/kazakhstan/>
- 26 Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. (2024) "2024 Investment Climate Statements: Uzbekistan" *US Department of State*. (Accessed on 20th June 2025)  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/uzbekistan/>
- 27 International Trade Administration. (Accessed 20 March 2026). "Countries currently designated by commerce as Non-Market Economy countries. US Department of Commerce.  
<https://www.trade.gov/nme-countries-list>
- 28 Business Times. 20 May 2024. "MITI secured RM2.4bil potential exports from PM's visits to Krygyz, Kazakhstan & Uzbekistan". *New Straits Times*.  
<https://www.nst.com.my/business/corporate/2024/05/1053039/miti-secured-rm24bil-potential-exports-pms-visits-krygyz>
- 29 Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). (20 May 2024). The Recognised Foreign Halal Certification Bodies and Authorities. <https://myehalal.halal.gov.my/portal-halal/v1/pdf/cb/CBLIST-20May2024.pdf>
- 30 A. Muratbekova. (2024). "Malaysia's New Horizons in Central Asia". *Eurasian Research Institute*.  
<https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/malaysias-new-horizons-in-central-asia/>
- 31 A. Meirkhanova. (21 August 2025). "Gulf Critical Minerals Playbook Offers Lessons for Central Asia". *The Astana Times*. <https://astanatimes.com/2025/08/gulf-critical-minerals-playbook-offers-lessons-for-central-asia>

- 32 Office of the Spokesperson. (4 February 2026). 2026 Critical Minerals Ministerial. *US Department of State*. <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/02/2026-critical-minerals-ministerial>
- 33 F. Macau. (31 March 2026). Why a second global shipping chokepoint could soon live up to its name as the “Gate of Tears”. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/why-a-second-global-shipping-chokepoint-could-soon-live-up-to-its-name-as-the-gate-of-tears-279548>
- 34 I. Holmberg. (25 March 2026). Iran War boosts strategic significance of South Caucasus. *DW News*. <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-war-boosts-strategic-significance-of-south-caucasus/a-76518386>
- 35 M. Aripova. (2 February 2025). “Cooperation between Uzbekistan and Malaysia is a requirement of contemporary time”. *Berita RTM*. <https://berita.rtm.gov.my/highlights/senarai-berita-highlights/senarai-artikel/cooperation-between-uzbekistan-and-malaysia-is-a-requirement-of-contemporary-time>





**INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
(ISIS) MALAYSIA**

**Address** 1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin,  
50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
**Phone** 603 2693 9366  
**E-mail** info@isis.org.my

 [www.isis.org.my](http://www.isis.org.my) |  [ISIS\\_MY](#)

 [ISISMalaysia](#) |  [isis-malaysia](#)

 [isis\\_malaysia](#)