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## **Framing the Diplomatic Ties between Kazakhstan and Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at investigating the prevalence news frames in the reporting of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's official visit to Malaysia in April 2012. Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis are employed to explore the way Kazakhstani and Malaysian newspapers cover the event. In terms of quantitative analysis, the focus is on the five generic frames, namely, attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequences. While the qualitative analysis is conducted to examine how's the issue being defined, what are the possible causes of the problem identified, moral judgement made and the supply of remedies to the problem. A total of 134 units of analysis from two major Malaysian English newspapers and two major Kazakhstani newspapers, surrounding the period of the President's two-day visit, were collected and content analysed. The results reveal that, although the occasion was mainly about boosting economic ties between Kazakhstan and Malaysia, responsibility frame was most highlighted, while economic consequences frame was placed in the last spot. Among the four newspapers, both *The Star* and *New Strait Times* were found to be significantly more interested than *Sovereign Kazakhstan* and *Kazakhstani Truth* in using the economic consequences frame. However, results of qualitative content analysis indicate that these four newspapers were sharing the same mind to portray their respective government as capable and determined in nation development.

**Keywords:** media framing, diplomatic ties, Kazakhstan, Malaysia

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### **Introduction**

Diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Malaysia were established in 1992, approximately three months after the post-soviet nation officially declared independence in December 1991. Since then, both the countries have been working closely to enhance

their political and economical ties. The efforts Kazakhstan puts in to foster closer relationship with Southeast Asia countries, especially Malaysia, are evidenced not only economically through various mega project collaborations, but it is also reflected on the frequency of its President's official visit to Malaysia. The most recent one was in April this year. It was the Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's fourth visit to Malaysia in 16 years. His first visit was in 1996, the second in 2001 and the third in 2006. During his recent two-day-visit in Malaysia on 18 and 19 April, he brought with him a delegation comprising ministers and senior government officers. Official visit of the nation's highest level leadership has crucial impacts on economics and politics of both countries – Kazakhstan and Malaysia, and this has formed part, indeed an important part of the countries' international relations strategies.

The strategy, however, would not be considered complete without involving the mass media. As Davison (1974) noted, mass media, especially the newspapers, play a pivotal role in achieving international agreement. He suggests that through reporting and highlighting on the issues under negotiation, media could be an important medium that provide supplementary communication channel for diplomacy. It assists in ensuring intra-governmental coordination and links governments with interested publics. Holsti (2004) opines that, in fact, political leaders need the media not only for the purpose of disseminating information, but also to survey public reactions towards their policies on international issues. The media coverage, which constantly reflect the public opinions, hence has become a crucial reference point for the political leaders in forming their international policies. In another study, d'Astous and Ahmed (1999) observe that, consumer purchasing behaviour of foreign product depends very much on their perception towards the particular foreign country.

It is worth noting that, how media portray a nation would directly or indirectly leave an impact on the public opinions. The work of Entman (1991) indicates that influence of news frames can be enlarged to penetrate public consciousness without the public aware of it. In other words, through special treatment of news, there is possibility that media players could influence public perception. During President Nazarbayev's visit, mainstream media from both Kazakhstan and Malaysia were invited to report the event. The major topics discussed were mainly on strengthening diplomatic ties between the two countries through economics collaborations. Judging at Kazakhstan and Malaysia are both developing countries, it is expected that their media are adopting developmental model. That is, according to Dominick (2007), media's roles are to assist the government in achieving national goals. Hence, when dealing with diplomatic relations, the questions of how these media portray the messages of their countries' leaders is the major concerns of this study.

### **Bilateral Relations: Kazakhstan - Malaysia**

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev first visited Malaysia in 1996. This marked an important point in history for the two nations where their bilateral relations at the

highest level has been officially initiated since then. In the same year, Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad made a reciprocal official visit to Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev's second visit to Malaysia in 2001 was on his private capacity, while his third visit was an official one and had brought forth the inking of Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement as well as several other bilateral business memorandums and agreements. In actual, starting from year 2001, official visits involving senior government officers of both countries were recorded almost every year. This including the Royal visit of Malaysian Yang di-Pertuan Agong XII, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin in 2003.

The Kazakhstan government under President Nazarbayev's administration highly recognizes the similarities between the nation and the Malaysia's multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious society. Kazakh, the majority in Kazakhstan, comprises about 60% of the country total population, where most Kazakhs are born Muslims. The remaining 40% minorities are mostly believers of other religions. The resemblance in societal structure has naturally defined the friendly and trusting relationship for the two nations.

In the international arena, Kazakhstan and Malaysia share many common grounds. One of their essential international collaboration is laid within the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF). Both the nations deem OIC and WIFE as the solid platforms to counter dominant western influences and fight for a balanced relations between the Muslim world and the West. In addition, the two nations also share the same stance on several pressing international issues, to name a few, combating international terrorism and drug trafficking, actively engaging activities striving for a fair system of trade and investment for the developing countries, are among others.

In terms of economics, Malaysia Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak noted that "Kazakhstan has the potential to serve as a gateway for Malaysian exporters to Central Asia and European markets, while Malaysia is well positioned as a gateway for Kazakhstan exporters to serve the Asean market (*New Straits Times*, 19 April 2012)." In year 2011, the total trade between both countries were recorded at US\$ 61.1 million, with US\$ 1 million goes to Malaysia's imports and the remaining US\$ 60 million for exports. During the recent official visit in April this year, President Nazarbayev had once again extended his invitation through mass media to all prospective Malaysian entrepreneurs to explore the economic potential of Kazakhstan. As he said during a press conference, Kazakhstan is building about 200 to 300 industrial facilities every year. With positive words framed and embedded in their messages to the mass audiences, governments of both the nations are at their best interest to further boost their bilateral relations through strengthening economic ties.

## **Literature Review on Framing Studies**

McCombs (2004) asserts that news media are influential in forming public opinions and political attitudes. Through its ability to reach mass audience and its capability to highlight issues and repackage information, media are competent to tell the public what to think about and how to think about them. Considering the powerful influence of the media, various news actors (e.g.: political leaders and interest groups) are eagerly to have their views included in the news media. Chang (2010) in one of his studies reveals that, these news actors are relatively more influential than the media players (journalists) in framing an issue. That is, in the process of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration of information (Reese, 2003), news actors were observed to be comparatively more active.

To further explore on the basic definition of framing, Entman (1991) suggests that the process involved selection of some aspects of a perceived reality and then highlighting them in the media text with the purpose to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and recommendation of solutions. As indicated in Entman's classic definition of framing above, the process of framing is a process of reproducing reality in a way that favour the news actors or the media players' interest. In other words, while framing is about reproducing reality on media through premeditated organization of information, news is not a mirror of reality. Entman (2008) goes on to point out that, a successful framing message must at least possess two qualities – accessibility and applicability. It has particular cultural resonance and it calls to mind the congruent elements of schema that were stored in the past. By repeating the framing messages over time, it could significantly influence audiences' perception (Sheafer, 2007).

There is one important point to be noted here, the news framing process is not free from cultural and political influence. As Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) point out, in order for the target audience to understand a piece of information, news actors must organise it in a way that resonate with the lay public's cognitive schemas, of which, heavily rely on the cultural context. The political influence, however, defines the roles and responsibility of mass media in a particular country. In other words, the way mass media operate and their reporting style are largely determined by the country's media policies. Fung (2002) asserts that, news reporting is contextualised and constrained by press structures and state policies, "*it is also a relatively autonomous cultural production of journalists negotiating between their professionalism and state control.*"

Since framing is the strategies news actors and media players employed to formulate messages that are influential, through analysis of framing, scholars could systematically identified the pattern of how a piece of information being organised. According to Entman's (2008) study, there are two major genres of frames. With the first centres around Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) definition where frames are

treated as the core idea of the story that has been organised in such a way to convey meaning. This genre is criticized for not providing sufficient basis for consistent measurement. The second genre is based on Entman's classical definition of framing as discussed in the paragraph earlier, where he lists down the four major functions of frames – define problems, identify causes of problems, make moral judgement and supply solutions. This genre that draws on the functional specifications of frame provide scholars a better option to consistently analyse framing strategies used in media. This genre is adopted in this study as the qualitative analysis to figure out the differences between newspapers of Kazakhstan and Malaysia in framing the political leaders' messages.

In addition to the above classification, de Vreese (2005) has put forth another two categories of framing, which he terms them generic frames and issue-specific frames. de Vreese is one of the scholars who vigorously suggesting for a systematic and constant definition for framing. In his definition, issue-specific frames are referring to frames that are specially identified in a particular issue and are only relevant to that issue. While generic frames have the ability to transcend thematic limitation and can be employed across a wide range of issues and context. Smetko and Valkenburg (2000) have contributed one of the most prominent working examples to this framing category. These two scholars in their study of the European politics have identified five types of generic frames – responsibility, conflict, human interest, morality and economic consequences. Each of these frames is accompanied with several attribute questions that facilitate content analysis. This categorization of framing make quantifying results of analysis possible and it is used in this study as the quantitative method to analyse reporting on President Nazarbayev's official visit. Below are the five generic frames formulated by Semetko & Valkenburg.

- Responsibility frame: This frame highlights the government's (or an individual's or a group's) responsibility and ability in solving the particular problem.
- Conflict frame: As its name suggests, this frame pays close attention on the conflict elements of the particular issue, for instance, argument between two parties.
- Morality frame: Within this frame, issues are examined through the morality lens by relating it to moral values or religious teachings.
- Economic consequences frame: This frame reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country.
- Human interest frame: This frame focuses on elements that could trigger an emotional impact on its readers.

Based on the two systematic framing analysis identified and discussed above, it is the aim of this study to employed both to explore how the mainstream newspapers from Kazakhstan and Malaysia covered the official visit of President Nazarbayev and portray the bilateral relations of the two countries. In specific, this study is guided by the research questions below:

RQ1: Are there any significant differences in news treatment between the Kazakhstan newspapers and the Malaysian newspapers in terms news saliency and news slant?

RQ2: What kind of frames prevail in the coverage of news related to President Nazarbayev's visit?

RQ3: Are there any differences in intensity in the use of different frames to portray the diplomatic ties between the two nations?

## **Methodology**

### *Sampling*

In this study, all relevant articles on the President Nazarbayev's two-day-visit were collected from two Kazakhstani newspapers – *Sovereign Kazakhstan* and *Kazakhstani Truth*, and two Malaysian newspapers – *The Star* and *New Straits Times*. The process of item collection were guided with several key words as identified by the researchers in advance. In total, this study managed to collect nine relevant articles from the four newspapers on 18 and 19 April 2012, with four from the two Kazakhstani newspapers and five from the two Malaysian newspapers. These articles were then being broken down into 134 paragraphs and taken as the basic unit for quantitative analysis. As for qualitative analysis, considering the meaning of an article is embedded in all the paragraphs, isolating anyone of them might cause misinterpretation, the researchers decided to take one whole article as the unit of analysis. In other words, there are nine units of analysis for the qualitative section as compared to 134 units for the quantitative analysis.

### *Quantitative Measures*

To measure the prevalence news frame quantitatively, a code sheet was developed. This code sheet is divided into four major sections. With three of them are used for quantitative measurement. The first section is designed to measure news saliency.

Besides the numbers of pictures published with the news article were captured, the five dichotomous attribute statements developed by Richard Budd (1964) are also adopted to determine the level of news saliency. For this section, one whole article is taken as one unit of analysis due to the nature of Budd's Attention Score's measurement.

In the second section, Smetko and Valkenburg's (2000) 18 dichotomous items measuring the prevalence of five generic frames are used. Among the 18 items, four are measuring responsibility frame, five for human interest, and three for conflict, morality and economic consequences frame respectively. Coders were required to answer "yes" or "no" for each of the statements. Each "yes" carries 1 score, while "no" contributes nothing to the score board. The accumulated score for a particular frame is then averaged according to the numbers of attribute statements it has. The final score ranging from "0" to "1" will indicate the level of visibility of the frame, with "0" points toward non-visibility and "1" full visibility.

The news slant of an article is quantified in the third section, where coders were instructed to run through a paragraph and decide on whether the message contained in the paragraph pro-government (value = 1), against government (value = -1) or neutral (value = 0). Inter-coding reliability using Holsti's (1969) measurement was conducted repeatedly to ensure data collected are reliable. This process may not rule out subjectivity totally, but it could ensure coders are at least sharing the researchers' perception in the news assessment. The acceptable minimal score of .70 was achieved for all the four coders indicates that the data collected are reliable.

### *Qualitative Methodology*

As mentioned in the earlier section, this study is adopting Entman’s (1991) four functions of framing (define problems, identify causes of problems, make moral judgement and supply solutions) as the basis of analysis. For each of these functions, there are two open ended questions used to guide the assessment of the particular news article. Coders are reminded that not all article contain all the four functions of frame and that they should record their observation only when they discover the particular framing function in the article.

## Findings

### *News Saliency*

During the two-day-visit of President Nazarbayev, as mentioned in the sub-section 4.1, a total of nine articles were collected, of which Kazakhstani newspapers contributed four articles, and the remaining five were from the Malaysian newspapers. However, after the articles were divided into paragraphs for further analysis, the Kazakhstani newspapers were taking up 85% of the total number of paragraph (112 paragraphs). While the Malaysian newspapers, with a contribution of 22 paragraphs, they put in only 15% of the total unit of analysis. In terms of number of picture published, the Kazakhstani newspapers once again ahead of the Malaysian newspapers by contributing 11 pictures out of the total 16 collected. In average, each of the published articles carried two to three pictures. The Malaysian newspapers, however, recorded five published pictures with each article accompanied with one picture. To further determine the saliency of the reporting on President Nazarbayev’s two-day visit, assessment of Budd’s Attention Score was conducted. As indicated in Table 1 below, overall, newspapers of both countries assigned a considerably high level of attention to the event ( $M=.69$ ,  $s.d.=.25$ ). Between the two nations, the Kazakhstani newspapers ( $M=.75$ ,  $s.d.=.19$ ) comparatively highlighted the issue more than the Malaysian newspapers ( $M=.64$ ,  $s.d.=.30$ ). Comparison among the individual newspapers, however, reveals that three out of the four dailies carried a mean score of about .65, except for *Kazakhstan Truth* ( $M=.90$ ,  $s.d.=.14$ ).

Table 1: Budd’s Attention Score

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (s.d.)</b>	<b>N</b>
Kazakhstani	.75	.19	4
Malaysian	.64	.30	5
<i>Sovereign Kazakhstan</i>	.60	.00	2
<i>Kazakhstan Truth</i>	.90	.14	2
<i>New Straits Times</i>	.60	.57	2



<i>The Star</i>	.66	.12	3
<b>Overall</b>	<b>.69</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>9</b>

*Note: unit of analysis: the whole article*

### News Slant

Considering news are production through a series of selection process, it is inherently selective and slanted, to certain extend it could be biased. And since news slant is an important consideration for framing (Entman, 2007), it is this study's interest to examine how news pertaining the president's visit is portrayed. Paragraph of news article is taken as the unit of analysis and the results are as shown in Table 2. It is worth noting that, out of the 134 units of analysis collected, none of the them indicated negative slant. 114 units were pointing towards the positive slant while the other 20 units were being neutral. With the overall mean score of  $M=.85$ , the four newspapers were generally publishing the news in favour of their countries' political leaders. However, comparatively, Kazakhstani newspapers ( $M=.88$ ,  $s.d.=.32$ ) provided their countries' leader a more positive image than the Malaysian dailies ( $M=.68$ ,  $s.d.=.48$ ). The difference in mean score between the two countries, nevertheless, is not statistically significant ( $t(132)=1.91$ ,  $p>.05$ , equal variance not assumed). Examining the inclination of news slant for each of the newspapers, *Kazakh Truth* and *News Straits Times* had all its paragraphs in the particular news framed positively ( $M=1.00$ ,  $s.d.=.00$ ). While *The Star* ( $M=.56$ ,  $s.d.=.51$ ) was the most neutral newspaper among all. Specifically, both *Kazakhstan Truth* and *New Straits Times*, in the Games-Howell's Post-Host Test, displayed significant difference when compare with *Sovereign Kazakhstan* and *The Star*.

Table 2: News Slant

Newspaper	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>s.d.</i> )	N
Kazakhstani	.88	.32	112
Malaysian	.68	.48	22
<i>Sovereign Kazakhstan</i>	.79	.41	61
<i>Kazakhstan Truth</i>	1.00	.00	51
<i>New Straits Times</i>	1.00	.00	6
<i>The Star</i>	.56	.51	16
<b>Overall</b>	<b>.85</b>	<b>.36</b>	<b>134</b>

*Note: unit of analysis: paragraph*

### The Prevalence of News Frames

In the analysis of news frames, generally, it is observed that newspapers of both countries were highlighting responsibility frame the most ( $M=.5690$ ,  $s.d.=.291$ ). This is followed by conflict frame ( $M=.1716$ ,  $s.d.=.177$ ) in the second, morality frame ( $M=.1617$ ,  $s.d.=.241$ ) in the third, human interest ( $M=.1328$ ,  $s.d.=.161$ ) the fourth, and unexpectedly, economic consequences frame ( $M=.1095$ ,  $s.d.=.256$ ) is in the last.

One-way ANOVA was performed to compare differences between newspapers of the two countries and among the four dailies in terms of framing preferences. Levene's test indicates that, in comparison between the two countries, responsibility, conflict and morality frames are observing the assumption of equality of variance, while the other two, human interest and economic consequences frames are not. As such, Welch adjusted F ratio is used to counter the statistical problem. The results point up that responsibility frame ( $F(1,132)=7.326$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and economic consequences frame (Welch's  $F(1,22.648)=7.756$ ,  $p<.05$ ) are the only two news frames that indicate significant differences. As shown in Table 3, though newspapers of both nations emphasized on responsibility frame, Malaysian newspapers ( $M=.7159$ ,  $s.d.=.291$ ) were significantly more interested than the Kazakhstani newspapers ( $M=.5402$ ,  $s.d.=.267$ ) in highlighting the news frame. In the economic consequences frame, Malaysian newspapers recorded  $M=.3182$  ( $s.d.=.418$ ) and actually placed its as the second most favourable frame. However, this was the news frame Kazakhstani newspapers least highlighted, only  $M=.0685$  ( $s.d.=.418$ ) was recorded.

Table 3: Prevalence of News Frames

	<b>Responsi bility</b>	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Morality</b>	<b>Human Interest</b>	<b>Economi c Conseque nces</b>	<b>N</b>
<b><u>(A) Country</u></b>						
Kazakhstan	.5402 (.276)	.1815 (.178)	.1696 (.249)	.1375 (.170)	.0685 (.185)	11 2
Malaysia	.7159(.2 91)	.1212 (.164)	.1212 (.194)	.1091 (.102)	.3182 (.418)	22
<b><u>(B) Media</u></b>						
<i>Sovereign Kazakhstan</i>	.5451(.2 87)	.1639 (.179)	.1421 (.239)	.1377 (.161)	.0656 (.190)	61
<i>Kazakhstan Truth</i>	.5343 (.265)	.2026 (.177)	.2026 (.259)	.1373 (.181)	.0719 (.180)	51
<i>New Starits</i>	.9167	.2778	.2778	.1667	.8333	6
<i>Times</i>	(.204)	(.136)	(.136)	(.082)	(.408)	
<i>The Star</i>	.6046	.0625	.0625	.0875	.1250	16

	(.288)	(.134)	(.181)	(.102)	(.206)	
<b>Overall</b>	.5690	.1716	.1617	.1328	.1095	13
	(.285)	(.177)	(.241)	(.161)	(.256)	4

*Note: Values in parentheses represent standard deviations.*

In the Levene's test comparing differences among the four newspapers, only responsibility frame meet the assumption of equality of variance. Hence, Welch statistic is used to detect significant differences. As shown in Table 4, there are four news frames which  $p < \alpha (.05)$ ; responsibility (Welch's  $F(3,21.32)=6.101, p < .05$ ), conflict (Welch's  $F(3,21.526)=4.935, p < .05$ ), morality (Welch's  $F(3,23.34)=2.041, p < .05$ ) and economic consequences frames (Welch's  $F(3,19.15)=6.740, p < .05$ ). Human interest frame, with Welch's  $F(3,24.57)=1.322, p > .05$ , indicates that there is no significant difference among the four newspapers in highlighting the news frame.

Table 4: Robust Tests of Equality of Means

		<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
Responsibility*	Welch	6.101	3	21.232	.004
Conflict*	Welch	4.935	3	21.526	.009
Morality*	Welch	3.418	3	23.338	.034
Human Interest	Welch	1.322	3	24.574	.290
Economical Consequences*	Welch	6.740	3	19.145	.003

Games-Howell Post-Hoc procedure is used to further explore on how do the pairs of groups differ since the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met. In regard with responsibility frame, there are two pairs that show significant difference; *Sovereign Kazakhstan* vs. *New Straits Times* with mean difference of .3716,  $p(.019) < .05$ , and *Kazakhstan Truth* vs. *New Straits Times* with mean difference of .3824,  $p(.016) < .05$ . *New Straits Times* ( $M=.9167, s.d.=.204$ ) is the top among the four dailies in highlighting the responsibility frame. *The Star* ( $M=.6046, s.d.=.288$ ) is in the second, and followed by *Sovereign Kazakhstan* ( $M=.5451, s.d.=.287$ ) and *Kazakhstan Truth* ( $M=.5343, s.d.=.265$ ) in the third and fourth respectively.

For conflict frame, *New Straits Times* vs. *The Star* with mean difference of .2153,  $p(.038) < .05$ , and *Kazakhstan Truth* vs. *The Star* with mean difference of .1401,  $p(.010) < .05$ , are the two pairs that indicate significant difference. *The Star* ( $M=.0625, s.d.=.134$ ) was least interested in using conflict frame in its reports. *New Straits Times* ( $M=.2778, s.d.=.136$ ) and *Kazakhstan Truth* ( $M=.2026, s.d.=.177$ ) were the two dailies among the four that highlighted conflict frame the most. However, with a mean score of less than .30, the level of prevalence of conflict frame is considered low.

The rank order of the four dailies in morality frame is exactly the same as that in the conflict frame. The Star ( $M=.0625$ ,  $s.d.=.181$ ) was in the last, while *New Straits Times* ( $M=.2778$ ,  $s.d.=.136$ ) and Kazakhstan Truth ( $M=.2026$ ,  $s.d.=.259$ ) were the top two in emphasizing morality frame. Nevertheless, there is only one pair in comparison that indicates significant difference, that is *New Straits Times* vs. *The Star* with mean difference of .2153,  $p(.047)<.05$ .

Although economic consequences frame is overall ranked the last, it is the news frame that shows most significant differences among the four newspapers. *The Star* vs. *New Straits Times* with mean difference of .7083,  $p(.026)<.05$ , *Sovereign Kazakhstan* vs. *New Straits Times* with mean difference of .7678,  $p(.020)<.05$ , and *Kazakhstan Truth* vs. *New Straits Times* with mean difference of .7614,  $p(.021)<.05$  are the three pairs that are varied significantly. It is worth noting that *New Straits Times* ( $M=.8333$ ,  $s.d.=.408$ ) was employing the frame far more prominently than the other three dailies as indicated in the mean differences stated above.

### *Defining the Issues*

In the qualitative analysis section, the study discovers that, among the four functions of news frames, the focus of all the four newspapers from the two countries was on issue definition and suggested actions of improvement. Kazakhstani newspapers took the official visit of President Nazarbayev as an opportunity to introduce to its people the importance of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Malaysia. With an average of 28 paragraphs for each of the four articles, the Kazakhstani newspapers allocated extensive space discussing various issues in Malaysia. The topics covered including its multi ethnic society, religious issues, political scenario, state history, royal family and economy. These topics were discussed in length to depict a friendly and encouraging image for Malaysia, especially on similarities the two nations share, and how Kazakhstan can learn from this experience. Malaysia was also being portrayed as the strategic partner of Kazakhstan in the Asean-Pacific region and is capable to open up more business opportunities for the country in Asia. The Kazakhstani dailies identified Kazakhstan as a new nation that is prospering, strategically located in the Central Asia and has the potential to be one of the leading countries in the Eurasean region. With these advantages, Kazakhstan is positioned in the news reports as Malaysia's pivotal collaborator in the Central Asia region. It was also stressed in the Kazakhstani dailies that the diplomatic ties between the two nations must be strengthen through multiple collaborations.

Malaysian newspapers were generally focusing on interpreting the president's visit as a crucial occasion to boost economic ties between Kazakhstan and Malaysia. It

was clear that the targeted topic for both *The Star* and *New Straits Times* was on economy. As reported in *New Straits Times* on 19 April 2012, there are four key areas identified for Malaysia to boost ties with Kazakhstan. These four areas are oil, gas, construction and airport projects. In *The Star* reports, an additional area was added to the list– Islamic banking, an area where Malaysia is well-known of and is experienced. The total future investment of USD 50 billion (RM 153 billion) by 2020 in Kazakhstan was also being highlighted in the report. The news reports implied that Malaysia as a nation of 55 year-old can share its success story, especially on its economy, with the relatively younger Kazakhstan. In the news report, Kazakhstan was portrayed as a young nation that is full of development potential and is developing rapidly. This is evidenced in the President Nazarbayev's report on the nation development, including the above figure of future investment. With pictures showing the King and the Prime Minister of Malaysia jointly receiving the President Nazarbayev, both the Malaysian newspapers had conveyed a clear message to the public, that this indeed an important event to the country.

Although the topics covered were on various relevant issues, and especially on economy for the Malaysian newspapers, but these media were making a connection between the two governments' capability to the success of the nation's development. As implied in the news reports of all the four newspapers under study, leaders of the two countries were highly recognising and appreciating each other's determination and ability to excel in nation-building. Prime Minister Najib pointed out that Kazakhstan is capable of helping Malaysia venture into the Central Asia and European markets, and Malaysia can open up a gateway to Asean market for Kazakhstan (*New Straits Times*, 19 April 2012). In the same report, President Nazarbayev said that Kazakhstan considers Malaysia as its closest in the Asia Pacific region and has been admiring its economic prowess. While both leaders were extending their support to each other, they were also at the same time showing off their competence in developing their own country. President Nazarbayev was quoted in the news reports saying that Kazakhstan is currently renewing its economy system with innovation and that the country is building 200 to 300 industrial facilities each year. While Nazarbayev was highlighting on the Kazakhstan economy potential, he had sent out a louder message on his government's aptitude for nation development.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines the way newspapers of both countries (Kazakhstan and Malaysia) portrayed the messages of their country's top leaders in terms of news salience, news

slant and prevalence of news frames during the two-day visit of President Nazarbayev to Malaysia. It is observed that Kazakhstani newspapers, overall, were placing more attention than the Malaysian newspapers in highlighting the event. This is especially shown in the length of news reports, where the four articles by the Kazakhstani dailies each contributed an average of 28 paragraphs as compared to only five paragraphs per article by the Malaysian dailies. Comparison in the number of picture attached and Budd's Attention Score all point to the same conclusion. Despite the difference in news salience, the newspapers of both countries were all giving their respective government positive portrayal, with each country had one newspaper that 100% indicating positive news slant – *Kazakhstan Truth* and *New Straits Times*.

Further investigation reveals that among those positive portrayals, responsibility frame was most used in reporting of the president's visit. The ability and responsibility of the governments in nation development were being highlighted intensely. Though newspapers of both countries focus attention on this news frame, Malaysian newspapers were comparatively emphasizing on it more. Newspapers of both countries were observed to be highly supportive to their government and are proactively portraying their country's leaders as highly capable and are determined in nation development. In the reporting of various transnational collaborations, the newspapers were connecting the success in bilateral relations and nation development of their countries to their respective governments' capability.

While we see unity in the usage of responsibility frame, newspapers of Kazakhstan and Malaysia diverse profoundly in the economic consequences frame. It was the second most prominent news frame for the Malaysian newspapers but was least highlighted in the Kazakhstani dailies. Qualitative analysis of this study discovers that Malaysia newspapers were fully focus on economic collaborations between the two countries. In addition to the government's capability in making those investment projects success, the potential benefits of such collaborations were also being discussed extensively. Unlike the Malaysian newspapers, both *Kazakhstan Truth* and *Sovereign Kazakhstan* embarked on a wide range of issue discussion to describe the importance of the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Malaysia, and economic collaboration was only a part of it. The issues discussed in the Kazakhstani newspapers include history, religions, political and societal structure of Malaysia with highlights on the similarities the two nations share. Nation-building was the main focus of the Kazakhstani newspapers rather than economic collaborations.

Despite the difference in issue covered in newspapers of the two countries, as indicated in the above discussion, they shared an important mission, that is to uphold the positive image of their countries and their governments. While Malaysia was portrayed as an experienced developing nation with list of successful history to share, Kazakhstan is a young nation that is developing fast and full of economic potential. These positive national image is deemed pivotal in developing a competence bilateral relations, especially where public perception are engaged as part of the strategy. Scholars (Soroka, 2003; Wanta & Hu, 1993) have found that the way public perceive a nation is strongly correlated to how the particular country is portrayed in media on its foreign affairs. This

finding is further supported by Brewer, Graf and Willnat's (2003) experiment results, which indicates that the prevalence news frame displayed on the media is influential on people's perception of other countries. Boulding (1959) suggests that geographical location, historical ties, military allies, economic resources, political system and cultural proximity are crucial issues in bilateral relations. Hence, the way these issue are framed in the media has an impact on a country's national image. Judging at the wide range of issue covered by the Kazakhstani newspapers as compared to the Malaysian dailies, it is expected that a comparatively better national image has been created for Malaysia by the Kazakhstani newspapers. Nevertheless, this presumption has to be scientifically tested in future study to determine its validity.

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