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Mohamed-visit

BN VISIT PAVES THE WAY FOR STRONGER KUALA LUMPUR-HAVANA TIES

By: Azman Hashim

HAVANA (Cuba) Feb 25 -- A high-powered Barisan Nasional (BN) mission here, marking the first real contact between Malaysian and Cuban leaders limited in the past to acquaintances at international forums, has opened the door to a more meaningful Kuala Lumpur-Havana ties.

Against the backdrop of the US-initiated blockage on this Caribbean state, the Malaysian leaders, represented by the four major component parties of the ruling National Front, achieved significant breakthrough in political relationship with Havana notwithstanding differences in political ideologies and beliefs.

The two countries which have no diplomatic missions in their respective capitals can now look forward to a warm and cordial ties picking up from this fact-finding mission led by BN secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat.

Mohamed, who is Information Minister, told a news conference at the Jose Marti Airport here that the stage had been set for other leaders, especially of the younger generation, to improve and solidify the efforts initiated by the ruling party.

He left the Cuban capital for Kuala Lumpur after leading a five-day working visit here, the first by a Malaysian leader.

Others members of the mission include Umno Supreme Council member Tan Sri Hussein Ahmad, MCA vice-president Ong Ka Ting, MIC secretary-general Tan Sri G. Vadiveloo, Gerakan secretary-general Tan Sri Chan Choon Tak and two Malaysian businessmen.

"We have met our targets and now let the others pick up from here," Mohamed said, adding that the visit was made with the full realisation of the need to strengthen ties with Third World countries regardless of their political systems and ideologies.

"Soon we will see more Malaysians, especially our political leaders, in this part of the world," he said.

The visit, which received a lot of publicity in the Cuban press, included meetings between the delegation and key members of President Fidel Castro's Cabinet.

However, the highlight of the visit was a 90-minute meeting between members of the mission and the 71-year old revolutionary leader at the headquarters of the Cuban Communist Party.

According to Mohamed, Castro was impressed with the progress made by Malaysia and the international standing of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

The BN secretary-general was of full praise for Castro's leadership quality which he said was underscored by the unity, political stability and development of the socialist state.

He also extended Dr Mahathir's invitation to Castro to visit Malaysia and the Cuban leader accepted it.

The visit also paved the way for the entrance of Malaysian businessmen into Cuba which offers ample opportunities to foreign investors.

Already, businessman Ainuddin Ahmad Noordin, who had arranged the visit, has made his presence felt in Cuba with investments in property development and biochemical industries.--BERNAMA

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