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China backs call for East Asian dialogue (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Citing that Asean and China have a major role to play in improving peace, stability and prosperity in the region, Malaysia welcomes Beijing's support for the grouping's proposal that East Asian nations exchange views on issues that affect them.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed confidence that the proposal would be realised soon as it would be another historical development in the mutual co-operation of East Asian countries.

The proposal also allows the countries to discuss issues related to peace, stability and economic development in the region.

Speaking at a banquet held in honour of Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng at Sri Perdana, Dr Mahathir said since China had become a full dialogue partner of Asean, it signalled a new era for Asean-China co-operation.

He hoped that China would continue to liberalise its trade and create more opportunities for Malaysia to increase exports, especially manufactured and semi-finished products.

"It is encouraging that relations between Malaysia and China have expanded to include co-operation in education," he said. "We appreciate the establishment of a Centre for Malay Studies at the Beijing External University."

Li arrived this afternoon with a 117-member delegation for a four-day state visit to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries.

Among those in his group are his wife Zhu Lin, Deputy Secretary-General of the State Council He Chunlin, Minister of the Machine-Building Industry Bao Xuding and Vice-Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan.

At the official welcoming ceremony at Parliament Square, Li was received by Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Li then inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 106 officers and men from the 1st Battalion Royal Malay Regiment.

Li and his entourage were earlier met at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International airport in Subang by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa, who is Minister-in-attendance.

At the banquet, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia admired China's impressive economic achievement in line with its economic reformation and "open door" policy. Malaysia also realised that with a population of 1.2 billion, China had a heavy burden to achieve socio-economic development, he said.

In trying to achieve its aspirations, the Chinese Government has contributed immensely to peace, stability and prosperity in the region, he said.

He also praised China's active involvement in projects under the Asean Mekong Basin Development Corporation and expressed confidence that with Beijing's support, the AMBDC would achieve its objective of bringing development to the region.

On Cambodia, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was saddened by the developments there and hoped that Asean would continue to help the Cambodians find a peaceful solution.

"Asean welcomes China's contributions to bring a peaceful solution so that Cambodia can concentrate its energy on development," he said. "We hope Cambodia will become a member of the Asean family."

On the Korean peninsula, Dr Mahathir hoped the four-nation talks involving North Korea, South Korea, China and the United States marked the

beginning of a dialogue for a permanent solution.

Malaysia, he said, was ready to contribute in whatever way possible to bring lasting peace to the peninsula.

Countries could not have a couldn't-care-less attitude towards the nationals of North Korea when they need food supplies and basic amenities during the famine, he said.

He congratulated the Chinese Government and the people for successfully and peacefully taking back Hong Kong.

"Malaysia-Hong Kong relations will further contribute to the overall relations between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing."

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