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## Good relations between China and Malaysia

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THE 21st century looks set to be an important era for China. Even as we approach the end of this century, China has already become the focus of world attention. Discussions are being held the world over to ascertain the likely role of China in the next millennia.

Recently, several Western scholars visited Malaysia to exchange views with Malaysian scholars.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that it would be better for the world to accept the fact that China would become powerful and to cooperate with it.

The recent visit of Premier Li Peng to Malaysia is testimony to the good relations between the two countries. On Aug 23, Li Peng addressed a public gathering organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs.

The meeting was chaired by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. It was so well attended that a large number of the audience had to stand around the hall.

It was well worth attending as Li Peng gave a bravado performance. He was engaging and at times he bowled the audience over with his sense of humour when answering questions from the audience. Li Peng appeared to want to convey to Malaysia the importance China placed on having a good neighbour policy in Asia.

He said that China was enthusiastic to be part of the December meeting in Kuala Lumpur of East Asian leaders including Asean leaders.

Dr Mahathir felt that the meeting would allow the countries to discuss issues related to peace, stability and economic development of the region. He also welcomed China's active involvement in the projects under the Asean Mekong Basin Development Cooperation.

On relations with Malaysia, Dr Mahathir noted that the two countries will strengthen relations in the education field.

Malaysia is happy that China has established a centre for Malay studies at the Beijing External University. This will stimulate interest in regional and cultural studies between the two countries.

Malaysia established diplomatic relations with China in 1974, the first Asean country to do so. It was an exciting time at Wisma Putra to prepare the agenda for the establishment of diplomatic relations. I was at that time the desk officer for China.

When the first Chinese diplomats arrived in Malaysia a short time later, I represented Wisma Putra to officially welcome them at the airport. I was then the Deputy Chief of Protocol.

It was a memorable occasion. The picture which appeared in is reproduced here.

When the Chinese set up their Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, their diplomats were the centre of interest. Their movements were closely followed.

I recall the time when China held its National Day reception. The event was well attended. Wisma Putra was aghast to find in attendance a number of Ministers and other dignitaries. It seemed that every Minister was jockeying to get an invitation to the reception.

Malaysia's relations with China had become very important and had brought into light the long historical ties which preceded the arrival of the Europeans.

The Sultan of Malacca had close diplomatic links with China. With the historic visit of Admiral Cheng Ho to Malacca, the royal household of

Malacca had developed close relations with China.

The visit of Li Peng coincided with the financial turmoil faced by several Asean countries. It was a good opportunity for our two countries to discuss the issue.

Li Peng gave assurances of China's commitment to cooperate. He said that Hong Kong had already decided to contribute US\$1 billion (RM3.4 billion) towards the fund for Thailand.

Li Peng also called for long-term strategy for closer relations with Asean economies, including cooperation in the financial sector.

China has established long-standing contact with varying degrees of relationship with all the Asean countries.

Until quite recently, the relations have been affected by bipolar rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. Now, with the Cold War over, the strategic architecture of the region has been transformed.

As Asean progresses and consolidates, the association would become a natural partner to China.

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