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LI'S VISIT AIMED AT BUILDING 21ST CENTURY-ORIENTED TIES, SAYS XINHUA

SINGAPORE, Aug 27 (Bernama-Xinhua) -- Chinese premier Li Peng's visit to Malaysia and Singapore from August 21 to 26 has laid a solid foundation for building a 21st century-oriented relationship of good neighborliness and mutual trust with the countries in Southeast Asia.

China's ties with the two countries date back to ancient times. Recent years witnessed a strong surge in their political, economic, trade, educational and technological cooperation. In particular, frequent visits by their leaders greatly boosted their mutual trust and bilateral cooperation.

Li's talks with leaders of the two countries covered both bilateral ties and regional and international issues, but the focus was on how to build a relationship of good neighborliness and friendly cooperation for the next century.

In Malaysia, both Li and his Malaysian counterpart, Mahathir Mohamad, held that despite major changes in the world since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the two countries have been able to treat their bilateral relations in the long-term and strategic perspectives. The deepening mutual trust between their leaders further injected a new life into bilateral cooperation which has been gaining momentum over the years.

China and Malaysia have been working closely together on many issues in international arena. Mahathir has on many occasions refuted the 'China threat' theory and voiced his support for China's stand on the issue of human rights. His advocacy for a re-examination of the 50-year-old Universal Declaration of Human Rights also won China's appreciation and support.

The two premiers also noted that the time when a few powers dominated the world was long gone and the current trend toward a multi-polar world is conducive to peace and stability both in Asia and the rest of the world. As a result, all countries and forces in the world should strengthen consultation and coordination in the fight against hegemonism.

In Singapore, whose economic and trade ties with China have grown in strength, Li's talks with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong centered on how to expand the scope of bilateral cooperation by tapping each other's potential.

Li told his host that China's long-term development strategy has created broad prospects for Singaporean businessmen to play a more active role in its economic construction.

As his visit coincided with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Premier Li also took this opportunity to reaffirm China's policy on developing good neighborly and friendly ties with the regional grouping.

He unveiled a 'five-point' principle governing China's future relations with Asean, which includes mutual respect, closer dialogue and consultation, mutual benefit and joint development, and seeking common ground while reserving differences.

On the issue of South China Sea which was left over by history, Li reiterated China's principle of putting the dispute aside to give way to joint exploration. He said that the issue should be properly solved by peaceful means and through friendly consultation in accordance with relevant international laws and marine laws.

Premier Li also made a major statement on economic and trade relations

with Asean. By taking advantage of their supremacy, he said, China and the Asean countries can cooperate more effectively in the future, especially in the financial field.

All these statements demonstrate that China highly values the positive role played by Asean in the Asia-Pacific region and hopes to further develop ties with the regional grouping. -- Bernama-Xinhua