

20/08/1999

Enhancing bilateral ties

SINO-MALAYSIAN relations are set to reach a new level of cordiality and co-operation with the two countries renewing their commitment to strengthen ties on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties. That Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been accorded the highest recognition on a working visit shows that China is well disposed towards Malaysia and its leader.

The warmth was palpable during the meeting between Dr Mahathir and his Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji. By leading a high-profile delegation to China at this time, the Chinese leader noted that Malaysia attaches great importance to their relations. Calling Dr Mahathir, "an old friend of the Chinese people", he credited him with having done a great deal to promote friendship and co-operation between the two countries. Stressing that his visit was partly to strengthen the close ties, Dr Mahathir complimented China for its progress.

The quarter of a century Sino-Malaysian ties have stood the test of time. Malaysia's Second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak took a historic step when he became the first Asean leader to have diplomatic relations with the Asian communist giant in 1974, a fundamental shift from the policy under the Tunku Abdul Rahman administration. Dr Mahathir, a leader with a bold vision, shifted the ties to high gear. Today, political relations have reached a mature level. Now Malaysia wants to deepen and widen the trade and economic ties.

Dr Mahathir's visit is seen as important as it takes place at a time when the region is recovering from an economic crisis and is facing the challenges of globalisation. There is much to be discussed and it is significant that the two Prime Ministers reached agreement on several key bilateral and international issues. China's assurance that it has no plan to devalue the yuan is reassuring at a time when countries in the region are gaining momentum on their recovery. Malaysia's reaffirming of its commitment to the one China policy will be appreciated by Beijing.

Indisputably, the close ties between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing augur well, not only for the two countries, but also for the peace and stability of the region. China, which acquired full dialogue partner status in Asean in 1997, has hitherto been playing the role of a responsible member of the world community. The agreement to establish a code of conduct on the South China Sea within the ambit of the Asean-China dialogue as a way of overcoming disputes and differences among countries of the region, is a step in the right direction. It shows China and Asean member nations are willing to resolve their problems amicably, without outside interference. That Dr Mahathir made it a point to thank China for its acceptance of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Free Zone demonstrates Asean appreciation of Beijing's support for the grouping's goal.

China, whose population is set to reach the 1.5 billion mark at the turn of the century and through its economic reforms, is expected to become an economic powerhouse. Far from being a threat, Malaysia sees a prosperous China as a force for good and stability. It offers enormous opportunity for Malaysia and other countries in the region to sell their goods and in turn a vast place to invest in. China's early admission into the World Trade Organisation will further open up the huge Chinese market.

(END)