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Malaysia-China (Focus)

MALAYSIA-CHINA TIES STAND THE TEST OF TIME

By: Ali Mamat

(On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China)

BEIJING, Aug 18 (Bernama) -- Celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Peoples Republic of China to be attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here tomorrow night need not necessarily reflect the history of the actual relations between the two countries.

This is because all credible historic evidence shows the ties of brotherhood and goodwill between the leaders and peoples of the two countries date back to thousands of years and came to be officially recorded only during the glorious era of the Malay Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century.

The signing of the diplomatic relations agreement here by Malaysia's late Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak and the then Prime Minister of China Chou En-Lai on May 31, 1974 was a mere formality to renew the relationship which had sagged due to unexpected factors.

These included the collapse of the Malay Government when Melaka was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511 and political upheavals in China itself which saw the collapse of the feudal system early this century. Followed by Japan's colonialism in China and the outbreak of the revolution of 1949 which saw the rise of communist rule in the country of more than one billion people.

According to history, the first official relations between the two countries began with the visit of Admiral Yin Ching to Melaka in 1403.

This relationship was cemented when China's Emperor recognised Melaka as a free, independent and sovereign nation in 1405.

This enhanced the scope of relations to cover trade and the exchange of visits between the leaders and peoples of both countries and eventually leading to even closer friendship following the marriage of Sultan Mansor Shah of Melaka to the Emperor's daughter Princess Hang Li Po.

Eventhough official relations between the two countries were severed following the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, links between the two peoples did not see any break.

Realising that the unofficial relations was not benefiting both countries and not contributing to regional peace and stability, Tun Abdul Razak gave the greenlight for relations to be restored to the formal level.

Thus the efforts began in 1971 when several social delegations from Malaysia were permitted to visit China.

One of the Malaysian nationals involved in paving the way for the setting up of official relations was former Housing Minister Datuk Michael Chen who is also here as one of the guests of honour for the celebrations beginning tomorrow night.

According to Michael, various programmes were undertaken to restore relations including what has come to be known as "Ping-Pong Diplomacy."

"I was asked to lead a ping-pong team from Malaysia for a friendly match with a team from China in Beijing."

"The result of the competition is not important. What is more meaningful to both countries is the effect of the competition which gave rise to the nostalgic recollection of the thousands-of-years-old history of relations between the two countries. This eventually led to formal establishment of relations in 1974," Michael told Bernama here.

Following the signing of the agreement, Malaysia-China relations prospered as can be seen from the volume of bilateral trade and peoples to peoples visits.

According to Malaysia's Ambassador to China, Datuk Abdul Majid Ahmad Khan, apart from investment involving the entry of capital from China to Malaysia and vice-versa, which was quite substantial now, the value of bilateral trade had also gone up.

For instance, since the ratification of the trade agreement between Malaysia and China in 1988, the value of Malaysia's trade with the communist nation had shot up from RM2.4 billion to RM15 billion last year.

The value of Malaysia's exports to China last year was RM7.8 billion whereas the value of its imports was at RM7.2 billion.

Abdul Majid said the value of exports and imports increased by 15.5 per cent from that of 1997.

He said from the aspect of investment, Malaysians' capital investment in China up to September 1998 was about US\$1.38 billion. Figures for China's investment in Malaysia were not available here but it was mostly in the timber, iron and steel industries.

In the area of peoples to peoples visits, the total number of Chinese nationals visiting Malaysia had increased from 106,878 in 1994 to 263,950 last year.

The number of Malaysians visiting China had also increased from 251,758 in 1995 to 300,000 last year.

According to Abdul Majid, several agreements had also been signed to further strengthen cooperation between Malaysia and China.

These included the Agreement to Avoid Double Taxation (1985), Sea Transport Agreement (1987), Investment Guarantee Agreement (1988), Air Services Agreement (1988), Memorandum of Understanding on Information (1992) and Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement (1992).

The celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations tomorrow night here are being organised in conjunction with the three-day working visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, beginning today.

Dr Mahathir would, of course, make this visit, a memorable one for the peoples of both countries.

Hence the Prime Minister is bringing with him a number of Ministers and scores of industrialists who would explore ways of further expanding economic, social and cultural relations between the two countries.

Tun Razak led the way to diplomatic relations and now Dr Mahathir is nurturing them for the common good of the peoples of both countries.

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