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Ties with China have come a long way

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IT was an evening worth remembering. If not for the food, it was for the entertainment - the song, dance, the magic show and the fantastic acrobatic performance.

The two boys and girls who performed the acrobatic act were out of this world. And the magician who fished a large live fish from under the VIP table was superb.

I understand from the grapevine that the VIPs, who included the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, were so impressed with the young acrobats that a suggestion was made for them to be invited to perform in Malaysia.

Not a bad idea and I am sure the Tan Sris and Datuks who were at the table and whose companies are not badly mauled by the economic crisis or are recovering from it will not hesitate to sponsor their trip.

The boys and girls of the Beijing Foreign Studies University - Beijing Wai Guo Yu Da Xue - were not bad either. They could have easily passed themselves off as a novice Malaysia choir with their rendition of Can ma li can and Rasa Sayang.

And the MC for the evening, Hong Ju Khee of ntv7, did us proud with her flawless Bahasa Malaysia. I was told by a Mandarin speaker seated beside me that her Mandarin was perfect too.

The dinner might have started a bit late by Chinese standards but the uniqueness of the occasion - Malam Persahabatan (Friendship Night) to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China - was not lost.

Credit must go to the Malaysia-China Friendship Society and its Chinese counterpart in Beijing, China-Malaysia Friendship Society, their corporate sponsors and collaborators.

Going by the camaraderie of the evening, one could easily agree with Dr Mahathir's assertion that although diplomatic ties between the two countries were forged only 25 years ago, the history that binds them dates back to 600 years ago.

Some scholars claim that the relations between the two lands existed as early as 2,000 years ago.

Beijing is extremely friendly and moderately cosmopolitan - a somewhat recent phenomenon according to a Malaysian manager who has been living in the Chinese capital for some years.

The change is largely due to the late Deng Xiaoping's Open Policy adopted at the 11th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978.

But Beijing, being in what is sometimes called the "dust bowl" is often hazy except after the rain.