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Ties with China will grow stronger: Dr M

Kamarul Yunus in Beijing

BEIJING, Thurs: The scope of cooperation between Malaysia and China will be further strengthened following the signing of the Joint Statement on the Framework for Future Bilateral Relations recently, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"The signing of the joint statement by foreign ministers of both countries on May 31 1999 will expand the scope of cooperation between Malaysia and China as the new century draws closer," he said at a dinner to commemorate the 25th anniversary Sino-Malaysia diplomatic relations here.

More than 700 Malaysians and Chinese nationals attended the dinner which was jointly hosted by the Malaysia-China Friendship Association (PPMC) and the China-Malaysia Friendship Association (PPCM).

Dr Mahathir said although relations between Malaysia and China have improved vastly in the last 25 years, there is still a lot that can be achieved to strengthen ties between both countries.

He urged Malaysian and Chinese nationals to forge close relationships to bind the already improved diplomatic relations between both countries.

In this regard, Dr Mahathir praised the two associations - PPMC and PPCM - for their contributions and role in forging close relationship and understanding between the peoples of Malaysia and China.

"These associations complement government efforts to forge close cooperation between China and Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged the rapid progress achieved in forging close relationship between China and Malaysia in the past 25 years, dedicating them to the efforts taken by past leaders such as the late Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia's second prime minister, China's chairman Mao Zedung and prime minister Zhou Enlai.

"While at the early stages the relationship was merely limited to trade, the scope of cooperation now covers investment, education, tourism and air services," Dr Mahathir said.

He noted that ties between Malaysia and China actually started more than 600 years ago and some historians said relations between the two countries had long been in existence for 2,000 years.

"For us Malaysians, names such as Yin Ching, Admiral Cheng Ho and Princess Hang Li Po were associated with the history of the Malacca Empire. Some of the impacts from such interaction between the countries during that era can still be seen in food, clothing and architecture," Dr Mahathir said, adding that the close relationship between the two countries at that time started to deteriorate as soon as the Western powers began to colonise the two countries.

Dr Mahathir said the handing over of Macau to China at the end of this year will not only be an important event for the republic, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary on October 1, but is also historically significant as this will mark the end of foreign colonialisation in Asian countries.

Chinese Vice-Premier Qian Qichen agreed with Dr Mahathir that both countries have enjoyed expanded cooperation and exchanges and maintained close cooperation in various fields.

He said the dawn of the new century will surely bring new opportunities for the development of Sino-Malaysian relations, especially the signing of the joint statement on the framework of future bilateral cooperation.

He said the leaders of both countries frequently exchanged visits to enhance friendship. President Jiang Zemin, for example, has visited Malaysia thrice while Dr Mahathir has been to China five times, he added.

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