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Iraq finds a friend in Malaysia

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ABOUT a year after my posting to Kuala Lumpur, the spirit of altruism among Malaysians and their leaders have made us feel at home. Malaysia's extensive support for the lifting of international economic sanction on Iraq is perhaps, most vocal.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been quite supportive to requests made at the United Nations for the world body to free Iraq from "the forces of imperialism". And the visit by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali to Baghdad recently was a strong indicator of how Malaysians have been with us all this while.

Like Malaysia, Iraq is also a peace-loving nation. Except for one or two incidents which were orchestrated by a superpower, Iraq has been quite active in most international bodies, which include the United Nations, Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Stability and prosperity in Iraq has since very ancient times been attributed to great leaders who have accomplished distinguished feats of unifying the country, consolidating the central authority of the state and extending its cultural and political influence into regional and global environment.

The unification of Iraq started about 2000 BC after being divided with the downfall of the third Ur Dynasty. It was accomplished by Hammurabi, best known for the famous "Code of Hammurabi", in addition to his intellectual, administrative, educational and military achievements.

The July 17-30 1968 revolution marked a new era; after seven centuries and a decade of changing history. The foundation stone was laid for a national government which truly and fully expressed the will and potential of the people.

The most creative efforts were exerted by a leader who felt the suffering of his people, shared their aspiration, fought against imperialists and cherished the heroic deeds of great Iraqi leaders like Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi.

It was leader Saddam Hussein who joined in the 1950s the Arab Baath Socialist Party, unified its ranks and prepared it to assume power on July 17 1968. Thirteen days later, he set the Revolution on its right course and purged it from extraneous elements on July 30 1968.

He was also behind some important measures which have consolidated the authority of the Revolution and its central power.

Based on a radical, revolutionary theory but in harmony with comprehensive awareness reality and the circumstances surrounding the national and pan-Arab unity, the President has maintained the course of Revolution away from deviation and diversion.

He was responsible for creating an atmosphere of reconciliation through solving the Kurdish issue within the framework of national unity. Since the early months of the Revolution, he worked out and led the negotiations and even worded the March 11 1970 proclamation of the Kurdish autonomy, which was put into force on March 11 1974.

Other national and democratic measures undertaken by the President were the formation of the National Pan-Arab progressive front in 1973 and the consolidation of political independence on the solid basis of economic independence.

From the early days, leader Saddam Hussein achieved a formidable task by

taking the strategic step to enhance economic independence. On June 1 1972, the oil industry was nationalised; first the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC) and then the remaining foreign shares.

The nationalisation provided the state with enormous financial resources which resulted in a huge increase in the national income, a high standard of living and narrowing the gap between rural and urban areas.

Iraq, with its strategic position and natural resources, felt it was necessary to perform duty and commitment to other Arab countries, notably Palestine.

Here, President Saddam Hussein devised plans and drew up policies for Arab solidarity, cooperation and support of Palestinians and Arab national struggle as a whole against Zionists, imperialist schemes to dominate the Arab world and exhaust their resources.

He played an active role in Iraq's participation in October 1973 war against the Zionists, standing firm against surrendering to the enemy and exerting tremendous national efforts that culminated in holding the Baghdad Summit Conference and forming the Arab Cooperation Council which comprises Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Yemen in 1988 as a step for pan-Arab unity.

On the international front, President Saddam outlined Iraq's policy and stances, namely enhancing friendly relations with former Soviet Union and Russia later on, with China and France, besides activating its role in the NAM.

The sanctions and embargo on Iraq are inflicting our economy, especially our people. We are fortunate to have friends like Malaysia and some countries who stood firm in applying pressure to the United Nations to free Iraq.

I am glad that Malaysia, despite the difficulties in the Iraqi economy, still sends its business delegates to look into the potential of enhancing our bilateral trade, which currently is very small.

President Saddam Hussein is doing all he can to lead the economy into its 1980s era again. Countries like Malaysia could lend support by mounting pressure on the UN to lift the sanctions.

And it is only natural for the Iraqis to back and rally President Saddam Hussein who, in addition to all foregoing feats and achievements, created opportunities for democracy to be practised.

It is hoped that one fine day, our economy will be back on track again. This is important as the strength of our economy is not only meant for our people but also for our friends as well.

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