

# Castro *fulfils* wish to visit Malaysia

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KUALA LUMPUR: Cuban President Fidel Castro, who is in Malaysia to fulfil his "old wish" to know the country, was given a red carpet welcome at Parliament Square yesterday.

The 74-year-old president started the first day of his three-day visit with a flurry of activities commencing with the official welcoming ceremony.

Castro, who was received by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Salahuddin Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, arrived wearing a dark suit instead of his trademark military uniform.

He held talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Putra-

jaya for more than an hour, discussing issues ranging from improving bilateral ties to globalisation.

The two leaders also witnessed the signing of an economic, scientific and cultural agreement.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the two leaders exchanged a lot of views and ideas.

"Dr Mahathir and President Castro got along very well. They were happy and the atmosphere (of the meeting) was very friendly as they are friends," he said.

On the agreement, Syed Hamid said Malaysia had agreed to extend its credit facilities by another US\$15mil (RM57mil) to Cuba to purchase palm oil.

He said a similar facility worth US\$10mil (RM38mil)

had been fully utilised.

"The two countries also agreed to more exchanges of scientific research and experimentation," he said.

Syed Hamid said Castro was keen on having Malaysian businessmen invest in the tourism sector in Cuba.

He said the setting up of a mission in Havana this year would make it easier to monitor the investment opportunities in Cuba.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir and Castro also shared their views on how to articulate the voice of developing countries more effectively and to make the world economic and financial system just and fair.

"Dr Mahathir mentioned that we (developing countries) are not working effec-

tively. We can go for meetings but if we want to articulate, we need a smaller group to act as a research centre."

He said the Group of 15 would be meeting in Indonesia soon to discuss "all kinds of mechanisms" to enable developing countries to put their views forward effectively without being marginalised.

Castro, who is leading a 200-member delegation, has also visited Algeria and Iran.

His visit to Malaysia comes a year after Dr Mahathir attended a summit of 77 developing countries in Cuba.

Castro leaves tomorrow morning and is due to stop over in Qatar on his way home.