

11 MAY 2001

Castro-Visit

CASTRO SAYS MALAYSIAN VISIT FULFILLS OLD WISH

KUALA LUMPUR, May 11 (Bernama) -- Cuban President Fidel Castro, who arrived early this morning for his first visit to Malaysia, said the visit was to fulfill an old wish to know the country and its people.

" This official visit to Malaysia will allow me to fulfill my old wishes to know this country and its people, its ancient culture, long tradition of struggle, beautiful nature and fertile and creative work in the field of economic and social development," he said in a statement.

Castro, who has been in power for 42 years and the world's longest-serving leader, said Cuban-Malaysian diplomatic relations established in 1975 had been unfolding in a satisfactory way.

The visit by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Cuba in 1997 and again last year had made a decisive contribution to bilateral ties, he said.

" I am certain that the presence of our delegation in Kuala Lumpur now will also lead to the upgrading of such mutually beneficial relations and cooperation between our two countries," he said.

He spoke of the many similarities between the two countries, despite distance and cultural differences.

As he put it: " We are bound together by the shared history of a colonial past as well as by our common condition of underdeveloped countries bent on progress but with a clear perception of the grave hazards threatening the Third World today and with a common decision to resist the sacrifice of our identity and self-determination to a globalization marked by injustice and danger."

Castro also expressed special admiration for the way Malaysia and its government courageously faced the catastrophic effects of the 1997 financial crisis, without relinquishing the defence of its sovereignty, its currency and ultimately its independence.

" The Cuban people who have been the victims of a ferocious economic war lasting more than 40 years, feel in solidarity with Malaysia that has also sustained its share of suffering as a consequence of the prevailing unfair world economic order," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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