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Cuban President visits Petronas Twin Towers, greets shoppers

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - President Fidel Castro visited the Petronas Twin Towers today and, on his way down, surprised dozens of shoppers at the KLCC by stopping to greet them.

The Cuban leader, who is on a three-day official visit to Malaysia, also gave a rare Press interview when journalists approached him, saying he failed to understand why there was much international criticism against Malaysia.

"There is nothing wrong or bad about Malaysia ... everything is good about it," he told reporters.

He also marvelled at being in the world's tallest building, quipping: "I felt closer to heaven up there ..."

Castro, who returns to Havana tomorrow, said he liked everything about Malaysia after seeing the country for himself.

He said Malaysia and Cuba shared many things in common, one of them was that they were constantly on the receiving end of the Western powers, adding: "We are proud of being criticised by them ..."

Castro, who was heavily escorted by bodyguards and officials, surprised everyone when on his way down to the foyer, he stopped to greet and speak to the crowd.

A large crowd, among them foreign tourists, had excitedly gathered earlier when word spread that Castro and his entourage were in the building.

Castro described Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as an excellent leader with "great ideas".

He also cited the country's administrative capital, Putrajaya and the Twin Towers as great conceptions and "marvels" that turned Malaysia into an appealing nation.

Castro was also asked if Cuba had learnt anything from the Malaysian experience, to which he replied: "A very important lesson and it is that when you do things right, you get as far as you intend to."

He said he had also learnt another important lesson, and added: "There are two rebels in the world, one is Dr Mahathir and the other is me."

Castro also said that he had become more rational when discussing religion after observing the strength it brings to its believers.

"I find it much more logical now to see people having that strength of faith inside. It's easier to understand the comfort they take in their religion."

He said he had learnt a lot while on his recent trip to Iran and found that women there were much more respected than those in the West.

Later in Putrajaya, Castro was hosted to a private dinner by Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's official residence, Seri Perdana.

Also present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar.

The 74-year-old Cuban has cordial ties with Dr Mahathir as they are both in the forefront of efforts to minimise Western domination over developing countries.

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