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Malaysia-Cuba

MALAYSIA SET TO ENHANCE TIES WITH CUBA

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is stepping up ties with Cuba with the opening of its embassy in Havana, ambassador-designate Mohammad Kamal Yan Yahaya said today.

As Malaysia's first ambassador to Cuba, Kamal Yan looks forward to facing the new challenge as he prepares to head the mission by the end of next month.

"Cuba and Malaysia have a lot of common interest...we have spoken up against Western domination and have the same thinking on globalisation," he told Bernama in an interview.

Describing the opening of the embassy as "timely", he said it would enhance political and economic cooperation as well as cultural ties between the two countries.

"There is also the potential to enhance trade ties...the embassy can facilitate a bigger Malaysian business representation in Cuba," said Kamal Yan, who will leave for Havana middle of February.

He said that last year Matrade, the agency promoting Malaysia's external trade, participated in the annual Havana International Trade Fair.

"I'll try to get Cuban President Fidel Castro to visit Kuala Lumpur...the best opportunity would be during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Bangladesh early next year," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in Cuba in April last year for the inaugural South Summit of the Group of 77 (G77) of developing nations.

Prior to his ambassadorship, Kamal Yan was Malaysia's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations in New York and deputy representative to the UN Security Council. The Malaysian Permanent Mission in New York is currently accredited to Cuba.

He was among six new envoys who received appointment letters from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah on Thursday.

Kamal Yan, 46, is also accredited to Jamaica and Bahamas as well as to the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic and French-speaking Haiti.

"I'm deeply honoured with the appointment and grateful to the government particularly the foreign ministry and minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar who has given me the trust and confidence to set up the mission," said Kamal Yan, who holds a Master of Science in Foreign Service degree from Georgetown University in the United States.

The mission in Cuba would be a gateway to promote Malaysian national interest to the whole of the Caribbean region, he said.

The embassy would also facilitate the exchange of news and information between Malaysia and countries in that region as part of efforts to boost South-South cooperation.

"This would enable the countries to get news direct from one another rather than through a third party or the Western media," said Kamal Yan, who is married to Sabrina Datuk Ismail. They have an 18 year-old son and two daughters aged 16 and eight.

-- BERNAMA

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