

22/05/2001

Yemen has come a long way

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ON THIS day in 1990, Yemen was reunited after a long struggle to achieve it. His Excellency Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen, raised the new flag of the united country in Aden, blessed by the full support of the entire population of Yemen.

The Republic of Yemen has witnessed, during the past 11 years, great achievements in all fields of the people's life.

Yemen is a democratic country where presidential, parliamentary and local elections have been held the last couple of years.

A multiparty system, the freedom of expression, free press and human rights are all implemented and well recognised under the guidance of His Excellency President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the sincere effort and hard work of the Yemeni people.

The Yemeni people elected His Excellency Ali Abdullah Saleh as president of the Republic with a 96 per cent majority during the presidential election which was held in September 1999. He will serve for a 7-year term.

The local elections and amendments to the constitution were put before the people in April 2001 and the 20 Governates of Yemen now have local councils to run the governates.

The Shoura Council was formed this month with 111 members. A new cabinet was also formed and His Excellency, Abdul Kader Bajamal, is the new Prime Minister. For the first time in Yemen's modern history, a female minister was included in the new cabinet, which gives women a bigger role and more participation in politics.

In the economic arena, the Government of Yemen has reiterated its unfailing commitment to economic, administrative, judicial and industrial reforms in order to create the most conducive climate for foreign direct investment.

In line with these objectives, the project to convert the city of Aden into a Free Trade Zone is slowly becoming a reality with the culmination of the first phase. In fact the container terminal in Aden was inaugurated in 1999 and has received an encouraging number of ships.

The country's laws provide guarantees to foreign investors seeking to undertake projects either unilaterally or through joint ventures with local investors.

The laws also guarantee the free and smooth transfer of capital and all profits in any convertible currency.

The relationship between Yemen and Malaysia dates back to the 15th Century. Historians of the Malay culture and civilisation have always acknowledged the crucial role played by the Yemeni merchants, Ulama and Muftis, especially from Hadramout in the Islamisation process which started among the Rajas and the high strata of the Malays, converting the Malay people into Islam.

The official visit of His Excellency Ali Abdullah Saleh to Malaysia was an important milestone in our bilateral relationship, and it took place on February 11 to 14 1998, upon an invitation from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Government of Malaysia.

During his visit, he held official talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in which they underlined the unique character of bilateral relations which is based on a common history, sanguineous ties and culture as well on an economic and trade partnership.

The presidential visit culminated with the signing of four important agreements.

The Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation Agreement laid the foundations for the establishment of an inter-Government Joint Committee.

Other agreements were the Trade Incentive Agreement, the Investment Guarantees Agreement and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Malaysian Authority for Industrial Development and the Yemen Investment Authority.

The Government and the people of Yemen have great respect and admiration for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir for his vision and the role he has undertaken in promoting stronger relations among member states of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the cooperation between South-South countries.

Hence they are looking forward wholeheartedly to welcoming him when he visits Yemen this summer.

Economic and trade ties may be the milestones by which the future aspirations of our two countries are assessed.

However, we must never underestimate our culture ties. As the Malaysian Prime Minister once mentioned, the people of Yemen were the first people from the West to come to Malaysia.

Finally, I would like to thank Business Times and the Malaysian media for their interest in Yemen, its people, business, culture and politics. I think the press can contribute strongly towards bringing our two countries and their peoples together.