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Malaysia-China

THIRTY YEARS OF GREAT LEAP FORWARD IN M'SIA-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 27 (Bernama) -- On May 28, 1974 when Malaysia's second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein began his six-day official visit to the People's Republic of China, history was set to be made.

At that time the Indo-China War was still raging and the Cold War, fought largely on ideological differences, was still very much intact.

The Malaysian security forces were still fighting the insurgency mounted by communist terrorists and China was perceived by certain quarters as being a backer of communist and subversive movements and a threat to liberal democracy.

Facing these geopolitical developments, Abdul Razak took a brave and bold move. In China, Abdul Razak met the then Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

A joint communique signed on May 31, 1974 by Chou and Abdul Razak announced that the two governments had agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Malaysia became the first Asean country to establish diplomatic ties with China.

Since then there was no turning back. A new chapter was created.

Kuala Lumpur and Beijing had seen upward trend in their relations in the last 30 years, encompassing areas such as economy, politics, cultural, tourism and education.

In the context of the prevailing geopolitical situation, it was trully a remarkable achievement for Malaysia to establish ties with China because of scepticism at that time.

It was also a major turning point in Malaysia's foreign policy as the country was largely perceived as pro-western at that time.

"Politically it was a breakthrough...a major step forward for the country. A lot of guts and courages," said Malaysia-China Friendship Association president Dr M.K.Rajakumar.

Rajakumar said Abdul Razak succeeded in making Malaysia to be

seen as
an independent, non-aligned nation.

History lecturer Abdul Rahman Ismail of Universiti Sains
Malaysia's
(USM) School of Humanities said Abdul Razak's far-sighted move had
proven
to be right despite scepticism from certain quarters over having
ties with
communist China.

"Maybe it is a way for us to show our freedom (from Western
influence
in foreign policies). That time, people were sceptic whether the
move was
right or the otherwise," said Abdul Rahman who has vast experience
in the
field of Sino-Japanese history.

Based on history, Sino-Malaysia friendship and people to people
contact
dated back to more than 2,000 years ago. The first official contact
was
when Admiral Cheng Ho, who made seven historic expeditions from
China to
Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, arrived in Melaka in
mid 1405.

Several years after Abdul Razak's visit, there was constant
high-level
exchange of visits to cement existing ties and explore new areas of
cooperation.

Among them: Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping visited Malaysia in 1978
followed by the visits by Vice-Premier Tian Jiyun (1986), Premier Li
Peng
(1990 and 1997), Vice-Premier Yao Yilin (1992), Chairman of the
CPPCC Li
Ruihuan (1995) and Premier Zhu Rongji (1999).

President Yang Shangkun visited Malaysia in 1990 and 1992,
followed by
Jiang Zemin who made an official visit in 1994 and again in 1997 and
1998
to attend Asean-related meetings while Vice-President Hu Jintao
visited in
2002.

On the Malaysian side, Abdul Razak's visit to China had led to
more
trips, by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and former Prime Minister Tun Dr
Mahathir Mohamad, who visited China six times between 1985 and 2001.

Sultan Azlan Shah made the trip in 1990 and 1991, Tuanku Ja'afar
Tuanku
Abdul Rahman in 1997 and Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (2001).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who visited
China
September last year when he was the Deputy Prime Minister, will
begin a

five-day official visit to China today at the invitation of the Chinese government and to commemorate the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

From the 1990s, Malaysia-Sino relationship reached new levels of development with cooperation and contacts in various areas such as tourism, education, cultural, science and health.

The most visible area of cooperation could well be in economic and trade.

With some 1.3 billion population and a purchasing strength of US \$6.3 trillion (RM23.94 trillion) plus strong economic growth, China being Asia's second largest economy provides one of the best market for Malaysian products and expansion of trade.

In 2002, with bilateral trade reaching US\$14 billion (RM52.2 billion), for the first time, Malaysia became the largest Asean trading partner for China, replacing Singapore.

In fact bilateral trade had been on the uptrend ever since diplomatic relations started, with less than US\$100 million in 1974 to about US \$20 billion in 2003. It is expected to hit US\$25 billion in 2005.

In the year 2000, the Bank of China set up its branch in Kuala Lumpur and two years later, the People's Bank of China and Bank Negara Malaysia signed an agreement on bilateral exchange of currencies.

The relationship had been on a win-win situation. Malaysia is China's 18th largest investor, while China is Malaysia's ninth largest investor.

"Future Malaysia-China relations will continue to be characterised by strong economic ties. This is so more with China's expanding economy," said Abdul Rahman.

People-to-people contact had been also on the rise. In 2001, about 460,000 Chinese tourists visited Malaysia and the figure increased to 560,000 in 2002.

On the international front, Malaysia and China, which is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a nuclear power, shared similar views on many issues such as on Iraq and Palestine,

terrorism,
globalisation and regional security.

Being a dialogue partner of Asean and a member of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), China had shown its seriousness as a responsible partner to help promote regional stability as evident when it signed the accession to Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) last year to promote regional peace and stability.

The then Vice-President Hu Jintao (now president) during his visit to Malaysia in April 2002 had said Beijing viewed all countries as equals, irrespective of their size and it opposed policies like the strong lording over the weak and the big bullying the small

Abdul Rahman also stressed that the establishment of Malaysia-China diplomatic relations 30 years ago and the many positive developments after that had not only benefited the two countries but contributed immensely to the overall regional peace and stability.

As the two countries celebrate the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic ties and 2004 being declared the Sino-Malaysia Friendship Year, Kuala Lumpur and Beijing are poised for greater heights in their bilateral relations.

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