

BY PAUL GABRIEL

SINCE Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's historic trip to China, the two countries have enjoyed tremendous growth in relationship not only diplomatically but in various aspects from politics to business and tourism.

Razak's visit 30 years ago sealed a friendship that was greatly appreciated and upheld by successive leaders of both nations.

The two Malaysian prime ministers after Razak made sure that this strong tie was cemented with frequent contacts and visits. The various new Chinese leaders have also made Malaysia, the first South-East Asian country to establish ties with China, a must-visit destination soon after they took office.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad worked tirelessly to harness the relationship, making seven official trips to China during his tenure as our fourth Prime Minister.

Now, it's Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's turn to continue the good work of his predecessors.

Abdullah's trip to Beijing tomorrow can be considered the most significant since the groundbreaking journey by Razak to meet Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai.

The scheduled bilateral meeting will be a coming together of Malaysia's new administration and China's new generation of leaders, helmed by President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

Malaysia's Ambassador to China Datuk Abdul Majid Khan said the PM's task would be to build upon the efforts of his predecessors, and open wider the path towards closer co-operation.

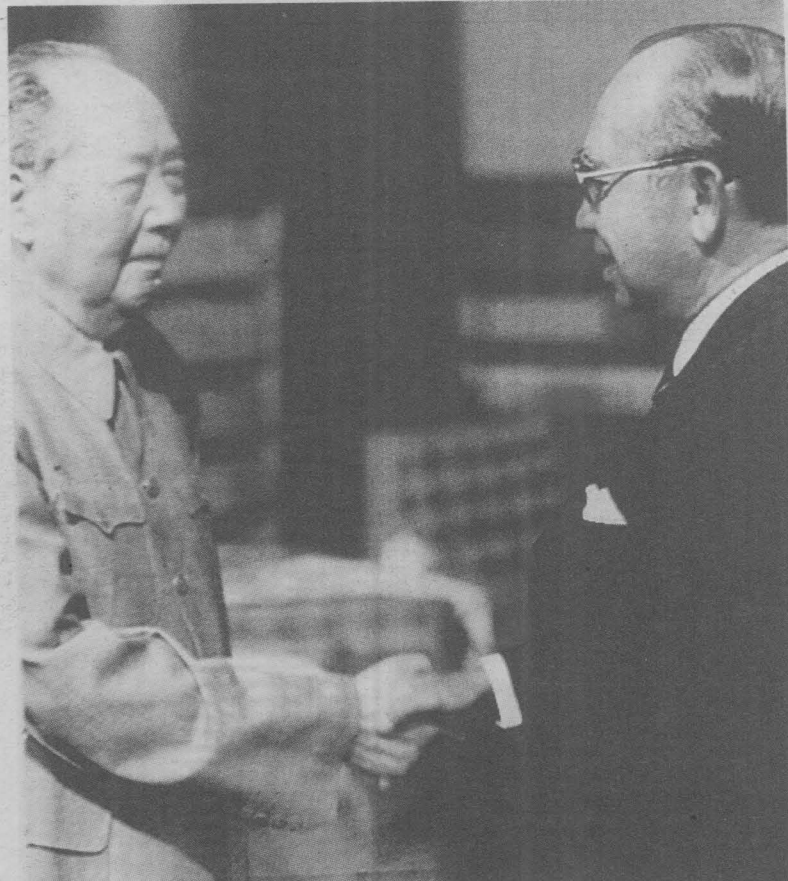
This will be Abdullah's second visit to China in a span of eight months - he was introduced to Hu and Wen during a special trip to Beijing as Deputy Prime Minister last September.

"He is coming over to renew his acquaintance with the Chinese leadership and also to help forge closer bilateral co-operation.

"The fundamentals of our relations with China have been good since 1974, but China's own position has changed

Harnessing the synergy

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The famous handshake between Mao and Razak that marked the start of relations between China and Malaysia.

dramatically. It is now an economic giant," he said in a telephone interview from Beijing.

Malaysia's involvement with China, one of the world's top destinations for foreign direct investments, is more than just "material" (the bilateral trade figure last year rose to a record US\$20bil or RM76bil).

Majid, who served in Beijing as counsellor from 1981-1985 before returning as ambassador in 1998, said several important agreements would be signed during Abdullah's visit

which would also take him to the bustling city of Shanghai.

"At least three agreements are scheduled to be signed.

"On the business side, several MoUs will be signed between Malaysian and Chinese firms. Malaysia's International Trade and Industry Ministry is studying these proposals," he added.

Abdullah is scheduled to hold talks with Wen and call on Hu before witnessing the signing of agreements between Malaysia and China on Friday.

He will also open a Showcase Malaysia exhibition organised by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corp and witness the signing of MoUs.

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to open a seminar organised by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka at the Beijing Foreign Studies University and officially declare open the Malaysian embassy on Saturday. This will be followed by a commemorative gala dinner hosted by the Malaysian side for 800 guests, including Wen, at the China World Hotel.

The upcoming MoU on education would be a "renewal" of the previous one, said Majid. The initial MoU, signed in 1997, paved the way for the exchange of academic staff, experts, teachers and students of both countries.

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka had then also signed an MoU with Peking University for Bahasa Malaysia to make inroads in China.

Majid said there was a growing interest in Bahasa Malaysia in China.

Newly-posted Chinese Ambassador Wang Chungui has had a headstart in his work.

He has been in the thick of things since arriving last month, attending cultural events organised by local Chinese bodies and receptions held to welcome him.

In an interview, Wang said he was pleased to be posted to Malaysia at this juncture of bilateral relations.

"Malaysia is my third posting as ambassador. I'm very impressed by the multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

"It's an honour and pleasure to be the Chinese Ambassador while our bilateral relations are experiencing the best development in history," he added.

Wang, who was previously his country's Ambassador to the Philippines, said he would do his best

to boost the bilateral relationship.

Wang, who replaced Hu Zhengyue, said he was thus far satisfied with the commemorative events being held to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

The ambassador said Datuk Seri Abdullah's visit would be the culmination of events to mark the anniversary.

"The Chinese government appreciates that he has picked China as his first non-Asean country to officially visit.

"Thanks to mutual efforts, especially Dr Mahathir's personal contributions, our political relations have seen continuous development.

"Now with the new leadership of both countries, I firmly believe that our ties will be more fruitful and successful."

Looking back over the past three decades, Wang said the political aspect of relations had developed nicely together with co-operation in trade.

"In recent years, our bilateral relations have entered a new era of fast and comprehensive development.

"We have maintained high-level visits and contacts, and enhanced mutual understanding and trust which has laid a sound political foundation for friendly relations and co-operation," Wang added.

On tourism co-operation, Wang said "as friends, we need to know each other."

"Only by coming here would the Chinese tourists know how Malaysia is 'truly Asia'.

"The same can be said of Malaysian tourists. If they do not visit China, they might not know well the 5,000-year culture and history of China," he stressed.

Looking to the future, Wang said the two countries would act as "good neighbours, good friends and good partners."