

Stepping up ties with Asian giants

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Abdullah to visit China and Japan next week

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Prime Minister's four-day visit to China next week will signal a significant shift in Malaysia's foreign policy, with emphasis on deepening ties with Asian giants China, Japan, South Korea and India.

This will be Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's first official trip overseas since the general election. It also marks the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China.

Abdullah, who will be accompanied by a large entourage of businessmen, is scheduled to visit Japan immediately after China.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today Abdullah's visit to Beijing and Shanghai was expected to enhance relations between the two countries.

"It's a continued emphasis of the relations between Malaysia and China, notwithstanding the change of leadership," he told reporters after attending the opening of the 11th Parliament.

During the visit to China from May 27, Abdullah is expected to reiterate Malaysia's stand on the "one China policy".

While there, he will open Malaysia's new embassy in Beijing.

Matrade is organising a trade exhibition to coincide with the visit, while a Malaysia-China business forum is also on the cards.

China, an emerging economy and a force to be reckoned with, has a long history of bilateral relations with Malaysia, and Malaya before that.

Malaysia was the first in the region to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing 30 years ago. The bilateral relations have grown over the years at the official, business and people-to-people levels.

Malaysia is Asean's largest trading partner with China. When the late Tun Abdul Razak made his historic visit to Beijing in 1974, Malaysia-China trade relations were minimal. Today, bilateral trade has grown by leaps and bounds and is in Malaysia's favour.

Last year, two-way trade between Malaysia and China totalled US\$13.25 billion compared to just US\$402 million in 1980.

People-to-people contacts have increased, as seen in the growing number of Chinese tourists to this country. Last year, some 500,000 Chinese visited Malaysia, and the number is set to grow. Direct flights between Malaysian and Chinese cities have also increased in frequency.

Malaysia sees China as a partner and not a threat, although increasing labour costs in Malaysia have seen some investors moving their operations to China, where such costs are relatively lower.

Malaysia, with its rich resources, must strategise with China to tap the latter's vast market potential as well as export to the world.

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