

**Mahathir An Outstanding Asean Statesman, Says China Minister
Bernama
3 Aug, 2013
By Minggu Simon Lhasa**

BANGKOK, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has described former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as a truly outstanding Asean statesman with a strategic vision for understanding that a bigger and stronger China will benefit its neighbours.

"As Dr Mahathir pointed out years ago, China's development brings benefits to the neighbouring countries. It is an opportunity, rather than a threat," Wang said in a speech at the opening of the High-Level Forum on the 10th Anniversary of the Asean-China Strategic Partnership here yesterday.

"I believe that Dr Mahathir did not make a casual comment here. He has a deep understanding of China," he said.

He said China is fully aware that although its rapid growth has generated tangible benefits for its Asean friends, it has, unavoidably, led to certain suspicion, concern or even misunderstanding.

This is nothing to be surprised at, because anyone could feel uneasy about a close buddy who has all of a sudden grown into a big fellow, he said.

He said China is getting bigger and stronger but its development is the strengthening of a force for peace and friendship.

He said in five years, China's imports will reach US\$10 trillion and its outbound tourists will total over 400 million.

He said China and Asean should step up efforts to build an upgraded version of the China-Asean Free Trade Agreement, and advance regional economic integration.

He said both sides should actively engage in maritime cooperation and make good use of the China-Asean Maritime Cooperation Fund, adding that China welcomes more project proposals from Asean countries.

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