

Much Tested Malaysia-China Relationship Continues To Shine

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By Alan Ting

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 (Bernama) -- The recent missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 and the kidnapping of a Chinese tourist from a resort in the east coast of Sabah has put to test Malaysia-China relationship.

Never before the relationship between the two countries, spanning over four decades, has been tested until the two recent incidents that happened one after the other within a short span of time.

The immense pressure on the powers that be in China is very much understood as 154 of the 239 passengers on the ill fated flight was its citizens due to the fact MH370 was a code sharing flight between Malaysia Airlines and China Southern Airlines.

And Malaysia too was under tremendous pressure in not only to locate the missing plane and seek answers on the lost of MH370 but also had to face the wrath of the Chinese media, next of kin and netizens over the handling of the MH370 incident.

However, can this two incidents really throw off track the Malaysia-China bilateral ties?

A SHORT TERM IMPACT

"In the short term, there will be some impact. The impact will be felt between three to six months, where we have to do damage control," said a senior lecturer with the Institute of China Studies at Universiti Malaya, Dr Ling Teck Soon.

He also noted that the harsh reaction from the next of kin in China was largely due to the poor handling of the situation initially as it was not familiar with the Chinese psyche.

"We need somebody who knows the Chinese body language. We lack somebody who knows how the Chinese think and communicate," he pointed out.

And speaking of damage control, he said both sides perhaps could start by celebrating the 40th anniversary of Malaysia-China ties.

ENTRENCH TRADE AND CULTURAL LINKS

On the economic perspective, Malaysia-China trade relations remain unaffected.

"When talk about trade, China is the number one trading partner for Malaysia. Similarly, Malaysia is China's biggest trading partner in Southeast Asia with trading volume exceeding USD100 (RM320) billion in 2013 and expected to rise to USD200 (RM640) billion by 2020," said president of Sabah Ma-Zhong Friendship Association Dr Oh Ei Sun.

Oh, who is also a senior fellow at the Singapore based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), explained that the Malaysia-China relationship has been deep rooted.

Both sides have signed comprehensive strategic partnership to expand economic and trade cooperation in line with their respective development strategies, aiming for USD160 billion (RM511 billion) in bilateral trade by 2017.

"The MH370 debacle at the initial stage was due to cultural and social differences as they have some misunderstanding on the handling of the issue. The highly emotional next of kin is one thing but what is deplorable is that there are some irresponsible parties who choose to spread baseless rumours over the Internet," he said.

Despite the upheavals at both sides, China and Malaysia threaded cautiously in words and actions to preserve the ties that both have built over the years.

Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in an interview with China state news agency Xinhua aptly described this scenario when he said: "The Chinese government is very "knowledgeable" and it knows Malaysia is trying its best. The relationship between the two governments will not be affected."

IT'S NOT THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT THAT'S ANGRY WITH M'SIA

In fact, China's Ambassador to Malaysia Huang Huikang also assured that Malaysia-China ties remained unaffected despite reports that the relatives of Chinese passengers on Flight MH370 were upset with the Malaysian government.

He explained the Chinese government never said that it was angry with the Malaysian government.

"We are family, good friends, good neighbours and this will never affect our good relationship. We usually find real friendship in adversity. So far, we have been in good contact with each other and are working together in finding the plane and comfort the family members," he told reporters at the Chinese Embassy here recently.

In fact, the Chinese government, through its various media has asked its citizens to act rationally and calm down over the missing aircraft.

MALAYSIA-CHINA 40TH ANNIVERSARY ON SCHEDULE

As with this year being the 40th anniversary of China-Malaysia bilateral relations, the plans to strengthen ties between the two countries will be top on the list.

Among the ceremonial gestures for the anniversary celebration include China loaning a pair of giant pandas to the Malaysia National Zoo for 10 years. Malaysia is scheduled to receive the two giant pandas from China on April 15.

MASkargo, the Malaysia Airlines's cargo carrier, will fly pandas named Feng Yi and Fu Wa on the night of April 15 and they are expected to arrive in the early hours of April 16.

The other included Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's visit to China at the end of May and the visit by Chinese premier Li Keqiang to Malaysia in June.

"The programme still go on. No changes. There is no hiccup in terms of government to government relations," said political secretary to the prime minister Wong Nai Chee.

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