

## **Malaysia-China Ties: 40 Years on and Still Counting**

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**By Alan Ting**

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- It was a letter from former Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein to his Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai in 1971 that started the ball rolling for the establishment of Malaysia-China diplomatic relations.

As both nations celebrate the 40th anniversary of Malaysia-China ties, the rewards from the bold and one of the most visionary move by Tun Razak continue to accrue till today especially in the diplomatic and economic spheres.

Malaysia-China Friendship Association secretary Tan Kai Hee pointed out that China appreciated Razak's boldness in establishing diplomatic relations as the nation was literally isolated by the world then due to its communism ideology.

Razak's visionary move literally set the tone for diplomatic undertakings with China for the region, with other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) establishing diplomatic relations with China subsequently.

After Malaysia inked bilateral ties with China on May 31, 1974, the Philippines and Thailand established ties with China in July 1975, Singapore in 1990 and Brunei in 1991.

Indonesia, which had suspended diplomatic relations with China in October 1967, restored ties in July 1990.

### **CHINA'S APPRECIATION FOR THE BOLD STEP**

China till today highly appreciates Tun Razak's bold step, stated Tan.

"That is why every new Chinese ambassador posted to Malaysia will invite (Tun Abdul Razak's widow) Tun Rahah (Mohd Noah) as a special guest to attend a dinner," he said.

In fact, when Tun Razak's son Najib visited China for the first time as Prime Minister in 2009, he was presented a gift by his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao a photo depicting his late father signing the joint communique with Zhou.

Tun Rahah also had been invited to visit China together with Najib then to commemorate the 35th anniversary of diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

### **THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CHAPTER**

With Najib tracing the footsteps of his late father four decades ago in his current six-day

tour to China, old bonds will be renewed and greater understanding established.

Over the last 40 years both governments have maintained close ties and had carried out a series of major bilateral economic, cultural and educational cooperation programmes.

This including setting up a Xiamen University branch campus in Malaysia, allowing a Chinese company to construct the Second Penang Bridge, as well as having a China-Malaysia industrial park in Guangxi and a Malaysia-China industrial park in Pahang.

In fact, China is now Malaysia's largest trading partner and Malaysia is China's biggest trading partner within ASEAN and has emerged as the third Asian country to record annual trade volume of US\$100 billion after Japan and South Korea.

And on China's side, in commemorating the 40th anniversary of bilateral relationship, it has loaned a pair of giant Panda to Malaysia, part of the nation's panda diplomacy.

Malaysia is honoured because it is one of the handful of nations in the world, 14 nations to be exact, to receive the pandas.

### **LARGEST MALAYSIA DELEGATION**

In commemorating 40 years of bilateral relations, Najib is leading the biggest delegation from Malaysia consisting of 300 officials.

"Prime Minister has selected May 31 to meet the Chinese leaders at the Great Hall of the People where his father (Tun Abdul Razak) stood on the same day 40 years ago," said Tan Sri Ong Ka Ting, who is the special envoy of the prime minister to China.

Therefore, Ong said May 31 would be another historic day for the two countries since the establishment of diplomatic relationship.

Obviously, with Najib's visit to Beijing, there will be plenty of opportunities for Malaysia-China friendship to reach new levels in bilateral relationship.

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