

Jamaluddin Jarjis, The Prime Mover Behind Malaysia-US Ties

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KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- Diplomatic ties between Malaysia and the United States (US) have shifted into high gear over recent years, and much of this positive development could be attributed to the work of Tan Sri Jamaluddin Jarjis.

Who could forget Jamaluddin's formal introduction to President Barack Obama when he proudly appeared in full baju Melayu suit at the accreditation ceremony for new ambassadors on Nov 4, 2009 in the Oval Office, at the start of his tenure as Malaysian envoy.

Thereafter, Jamaluddin worked tirelessly in efforts to promote Malaysian interests in the corridors of power in Washington DC and beyond.

As news of Jamaluddin's demise in a helicopter crash in Semenyih, Selangor on Saturday swirled, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak paid tribute to his long-time friend, saying that the latter was a person of high calibre who had sacrificed much for the government, party and country.

After visiting the crash site, an ashen-faced Najib told a hastily arranged media conference: "Tan Sri Jamaluddin played a key role in bringing ties between Malaysia and the US closer."

Those who had seen Jamaluddin - better known as JJ - in action knew what he was capable of behind the scenes.

A Bernama correspondent recalled how he once made a casual remark to Jamaluddin on the possibility of having a photograph of Najib together with the American president taken on the sidelines of a regional conference.

"To my surprise, he was able to pull it off - not an easy feat to achieve under normal circumstances - a few days later, resulting in our prime minister's picture with the US president being splashed across the pages of most major newspapers," he said.

According to him, Najib himself was caught off guard, but pleased nonetheless, when Obama invited him during a break in the meeting for the one-on-one photo session.

To observers, the photo session was significant as Najib was the one and only leader among those gathered at the meeting who was accorded that privilege.

This, the journalist said, was testament to the kind of influence that Jamaluddin wielded in pushing forward the agenda in Kuala Lumpur-Washington relations.

US ambassador to Malaysia, Joseph Y. Yun said Jamaluddin brought in commitment and

dedication to the partnership between both sides.

"The strengthening of our bilateral relationship owes much to his creativity, energy and vision," the envoy said of the 63-year-old former Malaysian envoy.

For his unrelenting work in highlighting Malaysia's interests, Jamaluddin was once dubbed 'Malaysia's Best Salesman' by a leading business group in Washington.

The business-savvy Jamaluddin leveraged on his years of experience in the corporate world to push for greater trade and investment ties between Malaysia and the US.

Malaysia and the US share robust bilateral trade amounting to tens of billions of dollars annually. The US is Malaysia's fourth-largest trading partner.

Besides trade and investment, Jamaluddin was known to have worked on forging closer ties between the two countries in other fields such as education and security.

Following his tenure as ambassador, Jamaluddin was appointed Malaysia's special envoy to the US, a position which allowed him to continue with his work.

It culminated in Obama making his maiden official visit to Malaysia from April 26-28, 2014 - the first by a sitting US president in 48 years since President Lyndon B. Johnson's trip back in 1966.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that no one would have been more pleased than Jamaluddin when Obama stepped out of the presidential aircraft on that day in April last year as he began the visit to Malaysia.

Jamaluddin, who was the chairman of Perbadanan PR1MA Malaysia (PR1MA), and Datuk Azlin Alias, the principal private secretary of the prime minister, and four other people were flying back from Pekan, Pahang, to Subang, Selangor, when the AS365N2 Dauphin (9M-1GB) helicopter went down in a rubber smallholding in Semenyih.

The four others have been identified as pilot Capt Clifford William Fournier; operations assistant Aidana Baizieva; Jamaluddin's bodyguard Razakan Seran and businessman Datuk Tan Huat Seang.

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