

'Diplomatic gamble' pays off

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After 30 years of friendship, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's visit to Beijing has put Malaysia-China ties at an all time high, writes WONG SAI WAN.



30 Years of Diplomatic Relations



DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's departure from China after a five-day visit marked exactly 30 years to the day the two countries sealed their diplomatic ties during a historic visit to Beijing by the then Prime Minister, the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Many saw it as a diplomatic gamble then but the visits by the subsequent prime ministers proved that the move has since paid off.

The current trade, investment and tourism ties between Malaysia and this emerging world economic power are testament to the heights of bilateral ties enjoyed by both nations.

"The current Sino-Malaysia relations have been in the best period of development," said Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during talks with Abdullah in Beijing on Friday.

When Abdullah called on President Hu Jintao and then held talks with Wen in Beijing last week, it was obvious it was a meeting of old and trusted friends.

The two Chinese leaders stressed that they were glad to welcome Abdullah again to

China this time as the Malaysian Prime Minister and also to jointly celebrate the 30 years of diplomatic ties between their two countries.

Six months ago, Abdullah had visited Beijing but he was the Deputy Prime Minister then, making a visit to introduce himself.

The Chinese leaders recognised the importance Abdullah and Malaysia placed on ties with the nation and reciprocated by giving the Malaysians the full VVIP treatment.

Abdullah and his nine senior ministers were housed at the Diaoyutai state guesthouse, which is normally reserved for visiting heads of states.

Wen described the relationship as "the best it has ever been with great political trust, ex-

panding common interests, closer economic ties and increased consultation and co-ordination in the international arena."

The fact that China was the first foreign country outside Asean that Abdullah was visiting was acknowledged by the Chinese leaders who said it was "a very significant gesture."

After all, Malaysia was the first Asean member to establish diplomatic ties with China on May 31, 1974.

The two prime ministers pledged to work together more closely not only on bilateral and economic ties but also at international forums especially on regional matters.

Abdullah further demonstrated Malaysia's friendship by announcing that his country recognised China as a full mar-

ket economy – again one of the first few countries to do so.

Such recognition is important to China, which joined the World Trade Organisation two years ago, as it continues to be "hauled up" by the US and the European Union for the alleged dumping of products.

A country that is recognised as a full market economy is not subjected to such an accusation.

At the end of Abdullah's visit on Sunday, a joint communique by the two countries outlined 15 points to cement the friendship and take the ties to the next level.

China and Malaysia agreed to promote co-operation in key fields such as agriculture, high technology, exploration of resources, infrastructure construction, health, education and tourism to increase trade volume.

Abdullah and Wen realised that to do so, the constant contact between the two countries needed to go beyond leaders.

There must be more contact on a people-to-people basis.

Not only did Abdullah take the opportunity of the visit to open doors for Malaysian businessmen keen on investing and

trading with China, he also wooed the increasingly affluent Chinese entrepreneurs to come to Malaysia.

On Friday, he launched "Showcase Malaysia in China 2004" where almost 90 Malaysian companies exhibited their products and services.

He then spoke at the Malaysia-China Business Dialogue, where 600 Chinese businessmen from 500 companies listened to his views on the business direction of Malaysia.

More than 30 Memoranda of Understanding covering a broad range of business deals were signed during his visit.

Abdullah also took the opportunity to lecture Malaysian businessmen to be honest and hardworking in dealing with the Chinese.

He reminded them in public on two separate occasions – once each in Beijing and Shanghai – that they must invest in their relationship with their Chinese partners and do not expect to strike it rich by doing nothing.

It was obvious Abdullah realised unscrupulous businessmen could easily scuttle any improvement of ties.

Abdullah told a gathering of 400 Malaysian and Chinese businessmen in Shanghai just before he left for home on Monday that working together through joint-venture projects was the best solution.

Those who accompanied Abdullah on this trip and his previous one in September experienced genuine warmth from the Chinese leaders, businessmen and even the ordinary people towards Malaysia.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Salleh recounted their visit to the Beijing Foreign University where Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka had set up a Bahasa Malaysia chair.

Among the welcoming ceremony was a choir performance by a group of Chinese students.

Abdullah and his ministers were taken aback when the students started singing the song *Jalur Gemilang*.

They were very touched by the performance, said Dr Shafie. "Their pronunciation was flawless."

By all accounts, this trip is a huge success and augurs well for future ties between the two countries.