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Title : 30TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE RECEPTION
HOSTED BY HE WANG CHUNGUI, AMBASSADOR OF THE
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO MALAYSIA

H.E. Ambassador Wang Chungui,

Excellencies

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. I am pleased to be here tonight to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China. This momentous occasion was also celebrated in Beijing during the recent official visit of the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia to China. It was a successful visit where both leaders discussed and agreed on various areas of cooperation between the two countries. The Joint Communiqué issued at the end of the visit lays down the foundation for further enhancement of bilateral relations, cooperation and amity between the two countries. Bilateral relations between Malaysia and China now are considered at its best and I am confident that together we would be able to propel it further to a higher plane.

2. All of this would not have been possible if the trip by Malaysia's second Prime Minister was not made three decades ago, on 31 May 1974. The strategic decision by the late Tun Abdul Razak to normalise relations with China was indeed a bold and far-sighted move. One should appreciate that the visionary move was made against the backdrop of intense Cold War rivalry, particularly in Southeast Asia, and concerns over worrisome political ideologies in Malaysia. The establishment of diplomatic relations with China made Malaysia as the first ASEAN country to establish such relations with China. I am happy that the move had opened the floodgates for other ASEAN countries to follow suit. Hence, tonight, we are honouring and paying tribute to the progressive and visionary leadership of both countries for taking such a grand and meaningful act.

3. Prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations, contacts between the two countries were very minimal and low key. There were still many among the Asian countries who believed that China was driven by raw ambition and could not be trusted and that rapprochement with China was premature and foolhardy. However, our leaders decided not to allow the differences in our ideology to colour our relationship. Instead, we focused on what could bring us closer together for mutual benefit. Today, we are glad that they had made that decision.

4. We decided that trade and investment cooperation should be at the fore-front of our bilateral relations. In 2003, Malaysia was China's seventh largest export market, while China was Malaysia's fourth. I am happy to note that our bilateral trade in 2003 reached USD 14.1 billion. Malaysia is also the largest trading partner of China among ASEAN countries. Both countries have made it a target that the volume of trade between the two countries should reach USD 50 billion in 2010. In this regard, the role of business community from both countries is critical in the attainment of this objective. In the field of investment, China was ranked as the 10th largest investor in Malaysia in 2003 while Malaysia invested USD 65 million in China in the same year.

5. Indeed a sure sign of closer relations between the two countries is that of people to people contacts. In recent years we have witnessed rapid growth in tourism in both countries. In 2002 alone, there were more than 600,000 Malaysian tourist arrivals in China while Chinese tourist arrivals in Malaysia were recorded as more than 557,000. However, this figure dipped in 2003 due to the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), but quickly recovered after the SARS epidemic was over. I hope the signing of MOU on cooperation in tourism last year would further facilitate cooperation in the tourism sector and help increase the tourist flows between the two countries.

6. Relations have been noticeably deepened in other areas too. This is amply manifested in the various cooperative undertakings and the recent collaborative efforts that both countries have made namely in fields of science and technology, education, culture, health and natural sciences. Closer cooperation could also be forged by both countries in the field of defence and security for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen

7. I am happy to state that Malaysia-China relations have today matured. The mutual confidence, respect and trust that characterise the existing cordial ties have brought interaction between the two countries to a new and never seen before dimension, embracing virtually all areas of human activities and endeavours. The mutually beneficial ties convinced both sides of the need and desirability to forge ahead for an even closer relationship in the years ahead.

8. As we now look to the future, bilateral relations and cooperation are expected to intensify even more as the two countries launched a new "strategic partnership". This partnership will pave the way for the further enhancement of relations at all level and all sectors of society. Malaysians and Chinese alike are now well aware that we are both compatible and capable of forging a partnership and camaraderie for our mutual benefit and also for the good of our people, the region and the international community. Therefore, we must explore new areas where this bond could be further consolidated and intensified.

9. In the final analysis, it is worthy to note that Malaysia and China have come a long way since our modest beginning three decades ago. This was developed neither over night nor effortlessly. It is our responsibility now to take advantage of our close bond of friendship and ensure that the excellent relations continue to develop for future generations of both countries.

10. This celebration for 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, I hope, will mark the beginning of the new chapter in bilateral relations cooperation and amity between Malaysia and People's Republic of China.

Thank you.