

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
Venue : [s.l]
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Title : AT THE RECEPTION TO COMMEMORATE THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN MALAYSIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

H.E. Pedro Monzon Barata
Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba

Distinguished Guests, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me and my wife to be with you all this evening on such a momentous anniversary. While I would like to say 'thank you' to all the generous sponsors and guests who are here tonight, allow me to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Pedro Monzon Barata, who since his assignment here in Kuala Lumpur, has worked tirelessly to enhance Malaysia-Cuba bilateral relations.

2. Tonight's event is part of the celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Republic of Cuba. I was informed that more events will be held in the course of the year to celebrate this milestone in the bilateral relationship.

3. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations on 6th February 1975, bilateral relations between Malaysia and Cuba which were initially confined to the multilateral fora have gone from strength to strength over the years. Malaysia-Cuba relations have come a long way since their modest beginnings and the mutual desire and commitment of both countries have now translated into a more meaningful and substantial relationship. This has been amply demonstrated with the exchange of high-level visits in 2001 and 2003 by President Castro to Malaysia and in 1997 and 2000 by our former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. More recently, YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Hj. Ahmad Badawi, also made a successful visit to Cuba in November 2004, which propelled bilateral relations to new heights. The opening of the Cuban Embassy here in Kuala Lumpur in September 1997 and the Malaysian Embassy in Havana in March 2001 are only a natural consequence of the growing relations over the years and mutual aspirations of both countries.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

4. Today, Malaysia and Cuba bilateral relations are at a level never witnessed before, with growing co-operation in the fields of agriculture, biotechnology, healthcare, medicine, science and technology and sports, not to mention the regular exchanges in the field of arts and culture. You will not need to go far to see that aspects of Cuban arts and culture can be seen more and more in Malaysia, by way of the renowned Cuban cigars, coffee, salsa music and dance.

5. I have had the pleasure of visiting Cuba a number of times and I can vouch that it is indeed an enchanting place with the most gracious people and I would recommend all of you to visit Cuba to see for yourself the numerous places of arts and culture and historical sites that Cuba has to offer.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

6. The Prime Minister's visit last November has already resulted in more Ministerial level visits to Cuba. The Malaysian Minister of Youth and Sports has just returned from a successful visit to Cuba last month. We hope that Cuba would be able to export to Malaysia its secret recipe for success in winning numerous Olympic medals! The Malaysian Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation is also scheduled to visit Cuba later this month. The Second Joint Commission Meeting between the two countries is also scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur next month.

7. So all in all, the year 2005 looks to be a busy year ahead for Malaysia-Cuba bilateral relations. This is indeed an ideal and apt way to celebrate the 30 years anniversary of diplomatic relations. However, it is pertinent to mention here that we must be careful to not just rest on our laurels of the past thirty years but continuously look forward to identifying new areas of co-operation to build upon our accomplishments.

8. On a concluding note, may I express my delight, once again, to be here today to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Malaysia's diplomatic relations with Cuba. I am confident that this anniversary will mark the beginning of a new chapter in bilateral co-operation and friendship between Malaysia and the Republic of Cuba.

Thank you.