

Next 40 years a 'diamond era'

Huang Huikang, China's ambassador to Malaysia, highlights the countries' progress in bilateral ties and their shared aspirations in an interview with THE STAR and CHINA DAILY

Q: How would you describe modern Malaysia-China relations?

A: Over the past four years, China-Malaysia relations have developed speedily in all aspects to become more mature and stable. Strong progress has been made in the development of infrastructure, major projects, energy, agriculture, finance, defense and security. We also see a deepening in cultural exchanges, as well as education and medical activities.

Our bilateral ties have enjoyed a "golden era" in the first 40 years. The next 40 years will see a "diamond era".

As China's ambassador to Malaysia, I have witnessed many historic moments in the development of bilateral ties. I feel proud to have contributed to bringing our aspirations to full fruition.

Q: What bilateral milestones have been created?

A: We have seen four milestones in recent years.

First, our relations have reached a historical high. President Xi Jinping visited Malaysia in 2013 and Premier Li Keqiang came in 2015. Prime Minister Najib Razak has visited China seven times. During the seventh visit, he signed a bilateral agreement valued at 140 billion ringgit (\$32.7 billion).

While attending the Belt and Road Summit in Beijing in May, he exchanged more views with our leaders on cooperation with regards to major projects.

Second, China continues to be Malaysia's largest trading partner for the eighth year in a row. China has become its largest source of foreign direct investment and the largest contractor in the construction sector. It is the largest non-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) source of tourists for Malaysia, with Chinese arrivals expected to hit 3 million this year.

Third, cooperation in major projects is flourishing. Examples include the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park, Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park, Malacca Coastal Industrial Park, East Coast Rail Link, Sabah Gas Pipeline, North-South oil products pipeline, and Alibaba and Geely investments.

Trade and investment cooperation between Malaysia and China has further developed, enlarging the

currency swap deal and establishing a yuan clearing bank.

Fourth, China Construction Bank in 2015 issued the first global yuan bond in Malaysia. Another event in 2015 was the first joint military exercise between the two countries. Xiamen University Malaysia, the first offshore campus for a State-owned Chinese university, opened its doors in 2016. Another significant event in 2016 was the signing of a pact to buy China-made coastal surveillance warships.

Q: What is the current condition of Malaysia-China investment?

A: Chinese investment in Malaysia keeps increasing and tends to be diversified. The investment field includes manufacturing, new energy, electricity, petrochemicals, rail transit, port industry, agriculture, fishing and finance.

China has invested \$3.38 billion in Malaysia since the end of June. According to data from the Malaysian Investment Development Authority, Chinese enterprises invested 4.6 billion ringgit in Malaysian manufacturing from January to June, which makes it the largest source of foreign investment in this field.

Some major projects are progressing steadily, such as the purchasing of Edra Project by China General Nuclear, the purchasing of the Shell Malaysia plant by Shandong Hengyuan, establishment of China Railway Rolling Stock Corp's ASEAN Manufacturing Center, as well as other projects involving Xinyi Glass, Jinko Solar, JA Solar and Guangken.

In the future, Malaysia and China will keep developing traditional trade, in areas such as electronics, oil and gas, and palm oil. Both countries will also explore new cooperative fields such as high technology, halal production, fishing, finance and e-commerce.

Q: How is tourism cooperation going?

A: Malaysia is one of the more popular destinations for Chinese tourists to visit. China is the third-largest tourist market for Malaysia, after Singapore and Indonesia.

In 2016, Chinese visitor arrivals to Malaysia reached 2.1 million, and Malaysian visitors to China exceeded 1.16 million, both record high figures.



China's ambassador to Malaysia, Huang Huikang, points to "mature and stable" bilateral relations.

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During the first five months of 2017, Chinese visitor numbers to Malaysia exceeded 1.4 million. The figure will hopefully reach 3 million by the end of the year.

Q: Will South China Sea disputes be resolved bilaterally? What could be the possible scenario?

A: The South China Sea was a peaceful stretch of waters until the 1960s, when new developments and issues surfaced. However, China and ASEAN countries maintained peaceful dialogue after the regional bloc was formed in 1967.

Without the interference of external forces, the South China Sea would have stayed peaceful and stable. China proposed that it would deal with ASEAN nations with overlapping sovereign claims on a bilateral basis, while the overall peace and stability of the South China Sea would be the joint effort of China and ASEAN. Most ASEAN nations

— including claimants Malaysia and Brunei — supported this proposal.

Although Malaysia is a claimant country, this has not prevented the smooth development of our bilateral relations, due mainly to the wisdom of the leaders in giving priority to economic development and cooperation. The emphasis is placed on dialogue to resolve disputes and to ensure disagreement will not affect ties.

In May, all parties agreed to a framework on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Against this backdrop, I believe Malaysia and China will continue to solve South China Sea issues via dialogue. This will not only serve the best interests of people of both nations, but will also ensure continued peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Q: Will Malaysia continue to be a key beneficiary of China's Belt and Road Initiative?

A: Malaysia was one of the first countries that supported the Belt and Road Initiative propounded by President Xi in 2013, and is one of the countries enjoying early harvests from China's investments. (The Belt and Road aims to improve connectivity along the historical Silk Road trading routes.)

The East Coast Rail Link project will benefit 4.4 million people along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia when it is completed.

Future opportunities under the Belt and Road will be seen in collaborations in electronics, oil and gas, palm oil, technology, halal products, fisheries, finance and e-commerce.

I believe Malaysia will continue to work closely with China on Belt and Road projects in its quest for speedier and better economic development.

I wish Malaysia a happy 60th birthday and many years of prosperity ahead.