

More milestones in journey with China

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DATUK Seri Najib Razak vowed yesterday to travel the journey of friendship his father began 35 years ago in establishing relations with China.

Speaking at the conferment on him of an honorary doctorate in international relations by Beijing Foreign Studies University, the prime minister described Malaysia-China ties as "very personal" to him and his family.

Tun Abdul Razak Hussein "did not think of one or two steps but a journey of a thousand miles, that is to say, the future" when he made his historic trip here in 1974, Najib said.

"Today, we who follow from the generation of my late father and Zhou Enlai enjoy the results of

what they had accomplished," he said.

"Still clear in my mind is my late father saying to me that 'I can work with Zhou and I have the greatest respect for him'," Najib said. "As my father had trusted the Chinese leaders, I have the same trust with regard to the current leaders."

The prime minister arrived on Tuesday evening for a four-day visit — his first outside Asean — to make his mark on the Malaysia-China partnership against the backdrop of the 35th anniversary of the signing of the diplomatic communique between Razak and premier Zhou.

Accompanying him are his wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, mother Tun Rahah Mohd Noah, daughter

Nooryana Najwa and son Nor Ashman.

"It took courage to make the decision and it was the right decision," Najib said of the forging of ties with Communist China. "I, as my father's son, pledge to take the China-Malaysia relationship to a level far higher."

He said Razak's example showed that relations between nations had to be based on trust, which made "everything possible, what we had never conceived before, a reality".

In 35 years, he said China had changed from bicycles and Mao jackets to cars and business suits in a peaceful rise that Malaysia emphatically did not consider a threat. Engagement with China

was not only a continuation of centuries of exchanges between the Malay and Chinese civilisations but essential, given Beijing's powerhouse role in the world economy, he said.

Najib praised the 60 Chinese students in the university's Malay Studies course and the 36 Malaysians on Ministry of Education and Mara scholarships studying there to teach Mandarin.

He said the Malaysian student body, comprising mostly Malays, would be doubled.

"I hope more Malaysians, especially Malays, will learn Mandarin. I have even encouraged my youngest child to study Mandarin, at Georgetown University (in the United States)," Najib said.