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Mahathir-talks

From Abdul Rahman Sulaiman

PARIS, July 7 (Bernama) -- President Francois Mitterrand of France has attributed Malaysia's continuing economic success to her strong cultural heritage, characterised by her hard-working population, high moral values and fine work ethics.

The president's observation was made to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during their discussions at the latter's palace here yesterday. *overseen trip*

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told Malaysian newsmen accompanying the prime minister on his visit here that the French leader was very impressed with Malaysia's strong economic growth over the last several years.

Malaysia is recognised as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, registering an average annual growth rate of eight per cent for the past 10 years.

"It must have been due to your strong culture," Mitterrand told Mahathir after brief pleasantries at the start of the 60-minute meeting.

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Abdullah said apart from exchanging views on international issues, the two leaders also agreed to further strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries.

A consortium of French and Malaysian companies is scheduled to sign a memorandum of understanding later today to pave the way for joint cooperation and investments in third countries.

Describing the accord as timely, the president suggested that Vietnam and South Africa could be the first countries the consortium should go to.

Mitterrand, who has just returned from an official visit to South Africa, said that the potential in South Africa was tremendous.

He also identified housing as the most urgent need of the poorest section of the South African population and suggested that rich nations of the world come out with a plan to assist the country in this area.

Mahathir told the president that Malaysia had been assisting the ANC even before they came to power.

The prime minister requested the French to provide educational training places for Malaysian students to ease their concentration on traditional countries like Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. -- more

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The prime minister said cooperation in the field of education would go a long way towards promoting greater understanding between nations.

This was because early contact between the young Malaysians with the people and the country where they studied would tend to leave a lasting impression upon them.

This would help them in their dealings with that particular country in the later part of their careers.

Mitterrand agreed and promised to instruct his prime minister, Edouard Balladur, to look into the suggestion further.

Abdullah said the two leaders also discussed Rwanda and Bosnia.

Mahathir appreciated the French efforts in swiftly sending its peace-keeping troops to Rwanda, even before the United Nations did so.

Mitterrand said France would withdraw its forces or hand them over to the UN command once the world body takes over.

The current arrangement, he said, was only a temporary measure to prevent the situation there from worsening.

On Bosnia, the president told Mahathir that he was now more optimistic of a political solution to the problem than he was before.

France believed that the solution must recognise Bosnian national boundaries that guarantee the unity of sovereign Bosnia.

Mahathir told the French leader that whatever the solution, the aggressors should not be rewarded. -- Bernama

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