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Mahathir-nuclear

FRANCE'S ACTION WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Malaysia still strongly condemned France for carrying out the series of nuclear tests in the South Pacific despite repeated appeals from the international community to end it.

He said that although Paris had halted the nuclear tests, France's action would not be forgotten.

"The people will never forget that this country (France) has decided to ignore the opinions of the rest of the world," he told reporters after officially launching "Multimedia Malaysia '96", Malaysia's Super Corridor expo and conference at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

The four-day expo and conference will be held at the PWTC beginning Aug 1.

Dr Mahathir said: "They (France) have already exploded six nuclear bombs and they have caused a lot of damage."

He was commenting on French President Jacques Chirac's announcement Monday to end France's controversial nuclear weapons tests after six underground blasts in the last five months.

The French embassy in a statement here today quoted Chirac in his television address as saying that the decision he took last June "caused anxiety and emotion in France and elsewhere".

Chirac added: "Thanks to this last series which has just been finished, France will have an efficient and modern defence system which will last. The security of our country, our children's country will be assured."

Last Saturday's detonation deep beneath Fangataufa Atoll in French Polynesia was the sixth, and Chirac said it would be the last.

Dr Mahathir said France, "as a member of the West", defied the rest of the world by carrying out the tests but it will be very critical if some minor violation of human rights is committed (by developing countries) and this the Prime Minister said was "hypocritical".

He said although France has decided to cease its nuclear tests, Malaysia will raise the matter at the Asia-Europe meeting (Asem) in Bangkok in March.

Meanwhile, Wisma Putra said France should accept full responsibility for any adverse impact from its nuclear tests on the people and environment of the South Pacific.

"Malaysia, like other countries in the region, is seriously concerned about the long-term environmental and ecological impact of these massive and prolonged nuclear tests on the region especially in the South Pacific, and calls on France to allay these concerns by undertaking a comprehensive and transparent study in collaboration with the relevant international bodies," it said in a statement.

It urged the French government to work with the other members of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva towards a successful conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty before the end of the year.

Malaysia also wanted the French government to show stronger commitment to the goals of nuclear disarmament and the ultimate elimination of these weapons. -- Bernama