

02 MAR 1996

France-Impetus

DE CHARETTE'S VISIT TO GIVE NEW IMPETUS TO BILATERAL RELATIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, March 2 (Bernama) -- French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette's visit to Malaysia beginning tomorrow is to give new impetus to improve French-Malaysian relations, a French Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Describing de Charette's visit as long awaited, he said the trip was part of France's new approach to Asia.

"This approach is culminating with the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) summit currently taking place in Bangkok," he said in a statement released by the French Embassy here today.

de Charette arrives here tomorrow for a three-day official visit, the first by a French Foreign Minister. He will be accompanied by his wife, Michele, several elected representatives and chairmen of three leading French companies

-- Alcatel, Lyonnaise des Eaux and Alsthom.

The spokesman said France wanted to become deeply involved in the rapid economic growth of Malaysia, which was its first trading partner in Southeast Asia.

"The fact remains that in Malaysia, as in other countries in the region, France only has a 3.5 percent share of the market," he added.

The spokesman said France also wanted greater political dialogue at the level of senior officials of the two foreign ministries.

Yesterday, French Ambassador Edouard Braine said the French Foreign Minister will explain the controversial French nuclear tests in the South Pacific during talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here on Monday.

Braine also said de Charette's visit was aimed at building a "political conversation" to "fill the gap" and pave the way for better French-Malaysian relations. -- BERNAMA

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