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France-Nuclear

FRENCH NUCLEAR TEST ISSUE IS OVER, SAYS DE CHARETTE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 5 (Bernama) -- France today said the issue of its nuclear tests in the South Pacific was over and it would actively persuade other nuclear powers to halt such activities, its Foreign Minister Herve de Charette said today.

"That issue is in the past and the question is finished now," he told a press conference here at the end of his three-day official visit to Malaysia. He later left for Pulau Pinang for a brief stopover and a meeting with Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon enroute home.

de Charette said he knew Malaysia's position on nuclear testing "very well" but the matter was not discussed in his meetings with government leaders here, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The question is finished now, France has decided to stop any nuclear tests and at the same time decided to close our test centre (in the South Pacific)," he added.

Despite strong protests from countries around the world, including Malaysia, France exploded its sixth nuclear device in the South Pacific on Jan 28, its 198th test since joining the nuclear club. On Jan 29, French President Jacques Chirac announced a halt in its nuclear testing.

de Charette also said: "France had also proposed what is called the zero option at the (ongoing) Geneva negotiations on the nuclear issue. I hope all the nuclear powers will accept it."

He expected the negotiations to be tough but said his government would be very active to ensure its success.

It was reported that a conference of 38 nations is negotiating the terms of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in Geneva, which would outlaw all forms of nuclear explosions but some countries had asked for exemption for certain tests or rejected the move outright.

de Charette said France was keen to participate in the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) which discussed, among other things, security matters.

"As a permanent member of the (United Nations) Security Council we are keen to participate," he said, adding that the ARF would be useful in maintaining security in the region. -- BERNAMA

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