

19 OCT 1996

Downer

RIGHT TIME TO BUILD NEW PARTNERSHIPS, SAYS DOWNER

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- There is a strong sense among Australians and Malaysians that the time is right to build new partnerships in all areas of life such as business and science and technology, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said today.

He said that the governments of Malaysia and Australia were well on the way to creating conditions in which the aspirations of the people of both countries could best be fulfilled.

"The philosophy of the Australian government is to encourage private individuals and corporations to use their own initiatives. It is not the role of governments to tell business how to do business," he said in his keynote address at the Malaysian Australian University Alumni Convention here.

Downer said efforts were being conducted on two fronts -- government-to-government and people-to-people -- to forge closer ties with Malaysia.

"I'm glad to say that the Malaysian government is fully reciprocating. For instance, I've now had four meetings with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the space of only seven months," he added.

Downer said to further develop bilateral relations, the alumni could promote Malaysia more actively through the media and continue to search out Australian partners in all fields.

He also said the people-to-people contact would be enhanced with the introduction of the new Electronic Travel Authority system whereby visas could be obtained through travel agents.

The foreign minister also fielded questions on the current debate on racism triggered by Australian independent Member of Parliament Pauline Hanson's remarks about a threat of an Asian invasion in Australia.

"The remarks of a maverick like that aren't a reflection of the views of the Australian government or the broader mainstream of the Australian community," he said.

He said he discussed the issue briefly with Dr Mahathir who Downer said made his position perfectly clear that he (Dr Mahathir) would not judge a country by the views of one person.

The three-day event which ends tomorrow is organised by the Malaysia-Australia Foundation in association with the Australian University Alumni Association in Malaysia and the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute.

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