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Keating-Malaysia

UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER BETTER TO ENHANCE TIES, SAYS KEATING

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 15 (Bernama) -- Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating has once again called for a strong and close Australia-Malaysia relationship based on mutual understanding.

"The past can no longer be the primary source of understanding between us. We must work hard to understand the modern face of our two countries," he said at a dinner hosted in his honour by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Seri Perdana, here, tonight.

Keating, who arrived here today for a two-day official visit, said Canberra and Kuala Lumpur needed "a fresh, contemporary appreciation of each other" consistent with the changes being made in both countries and with the fluid international environment in which Australia and Malaysia live.

"Change is something we have in common. It is fundamental to our contemporary existence -- as undeniable as any fact in our history," Keating said, adding that friendship between the two countries was "old and runs deep".

The Australian Prime Minister said there were almost limitless opportunities to develop what was already a very healthy relationship between the two countries.

"...we have the opportunity to create a new level of mutual understanding between the peoples of Australia and Malaysia and to forge a rich and rewarding friendship which will endure into the 21st century," he said.

He said that last year bilateral trade increased by 22 per cent.

Technology and research, including environmental technology, as well as education were important new areas for cooperation, he said, adding that Malaysia's new Education Act would broaden the range of cooperation by enabling the establishment of twinning arrangements between Australian and Malaysian institutions and the opening of Australian campuses in Malaysia.

Describing Malaysia as one of Asia's most rapidly growing economies with a growth rate of 8 per cent, Keating said Malaysia's economic revolution was watched with admiration in Australia "where the necessity for economic change and the rewards and difficulties which accompany it are well understood".

He said the changes in Australia had made the country into one of the most open economies in the world.

"And because this change in our economy has been made contemporaneously with the new dynamic growth in countries like your own, we also say that this is the region where Australia's future lies."

"The level of our engagement with Asia is unprecedented and I believe irreversible. And not just in economic terms. We now seek our security in the region not from the region," he said.

Keating said this did not mean that Australia was in the process of becoming "Asian". "We cannot be Asian any more than we can be European, American or African," he added.

"What we can be, and what we are determined to become, is a society which is rare in its cultural diversity, richness and tolerance, and a country which is strong and integrated with the region around it," he said.

-- Bernama