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France wants individual role in Asean forum

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FRANCE wants to be a dialogue partner in the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) on its own to strengthen relations between France and Asean and contribute play its role in the region more effectively.

This was conveyed by France Defence Minister Charles Millon during his meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar, who was present at the meeting, told reporters that Millon voiced France's intention to the Prime Minister to participate in the ARF individually rather than as a representative from European Union.

In response to France's request, Syed Hamid said, Dr Mahathir explained that the ARF has its own format and this proposal will have to be discussed among foreign ministers in the ARF, including its other dialogue partners.

The ARF, a forum to discuss on issues pertaining to regional security and stability in the Asia Pacific region, was first held in Bangkok in 1994.

Besides the seven Asean countries, the ARF dialogue partners are Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US.

Asean currently groups Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar are expected to join Asean in December, to complete the Asean-10.

Apart from the ARF, Syed Hamid said, Millon asked Dr Mahathir for his views on current regional issues and the role that France can contribute to strengthen the relationship between France and Malaysia, as well as between the European Union and Asean.

He said France is offering Malaysia its expertise in developing technology in the country and cooperation in various fields such as development and education.

"Dr Mahathir explained to Millon Malaysia's stands and his own views on regional and international matters," he added.

Millon is on a three-day visit to Malaysia.

Bernamea reports: Malaysia and France yesterday signed a security agreement enabling both countries to exchange information on intelligence matters.

Syed Hamid said the main aim of the agreement is to regulate and provide measures to ensure the protection and exchange of classified information between the two countries.

He said the two countries also agreed to maintain the confidentiality of the source and the type of the information being exchanged.

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