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Chirac-Malaysia

PARIS TO ENHANCE FRANCE-M'SIA INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

LANGKAWI, Nov 17 (Bernama) -- President Jacques Chirac today said France is keen to step up industrial cooperation with Malaysia in civil or military projects.

"I told Dr Mahathir that we are very keen to strengthen industrial cooperation including the construction of sophisticated civil or military products," he said at a joint news conference after meeting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here.

Chirac said that while Franco-Malaysia political relations were good, economic linkages between the two countries could be enhanced.

The French President said there were 235 French companies in Malaysia now and the number was on the increase.

He said France and Europe hoped to increase ties with Asia and within a broader context of the Asia-Europe-United States triangle.

He also said Asean, which was reinforcing its cohesiveness, could be one of the world's powerful groupings in politics, economics and culture like the European Union.

Chirac said Dr Mahathir and he also affirmed France, Malaysia and Japan's intention to undertake concerted development programmes in Africa.

"Africa is now progressing in the proper direction in terms of development, and even if there are difficulties, they must not undermine the reality of the changes taking place there.

"And we think that the three countries could coordinate their actions to make them more efficient and productive," said Chirac.

The French president also discussed Cambodia with Dr Mahathir but they did not make any stand on the replacement of First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Rannaridh who was deposed last July.

"It is an internal affair of Cambodia but on the other hand, we hope that the Cambodian electoral process being undertaken will promote safety to encourage the return of Cambodian political figures to enable them to contribute towards the re-establishment of peace, stability and democracy in that country," Chirac said.

He said Dr Mahathir and he concurred that Cambodia should fulfil the prerequisites for admission into Asean as soon as possible.

The two leaders also discussed the degradation of the peace process in West Asia, the proposed withdrawal of foreign troops from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the United Nations and the up-coming environment conference in Kyoto, Japan, on harmful gas emission.

On Iraq, Chirac said he had an hour-long telephone discussion with US president Bill Clinton over the issue yesterday.

"France hopes that the crisis will come to end as soon as possible," he said.

Iraq is facing possible military action by the United States following Baghdad's decision to expel American weapon inspectors working for the United Nations Special Commission to disarm Iraq.

Malaysian officials present at the Mahathir-Chirac meeting were Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar and Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Marican.

The French side include Diplomatic Counsellor to the Presidency Jean-David Levitte and France Foreign Under Secretary for Asean Department Francois Dopfer and Special Envoy of the President for Franco-Malaysian

relations, Jean-Claude Paye. -- BERNAMA
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