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Special French envoy aims to strengthen ties

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FRANCE, recognising Malaysia's growing significance in the region, aims to strengthen its relations with the country in areas that will yield mutual long-term benefits.

Its special envoy to Malaysia, Mr Jean Claude Paye, said France's future investments in Malaysia will be long term and not on a project-to-project basis.

"The areas that will be emphasised include human resources development, training and technology transfer," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Paye noted his new appointment - the first France has made - will act as a catalyst to further nurture the political and economic ties it has with Malaysia.

He was appointed France's special envoy to Malaysia last December by President Jacques Chirac.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has appointed Foreign Ministry former secretary-general Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar as Paye's counterpart.

"The heads of Malaysia and France decided to have the special envoy positions to further improve existing ties between the two countries.

It will help to broaden the relationship to new areas of mutual interest," he added.

Paye said he is happy with the appointment as it will give him the chance to work with Malaysia, a country he described as "a leader and speaker for developing countries".

He noted Malaysia has recorded tremendous progress and is opening its economy to other nations rapidly.

"In view of Malaysia's strong achievements in past years, France feels there is a need to appoint a special envoy to Malaysia to foster stronger relations with the country," he said.

Paye said the special envoy positions that Malaysia and France have established will help to provide solutions to confrontational issues that arise between rapidly developing economies and developed nations.

During his short stay in Malaysia, Paye paid visits to Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin and his counterpart Ahmad Kamil.

Paye is scheduled to visit Malaysia again in March.

Meanwhile, French Ambassador to Malaysia Edouard Braine said the fact that France has created the position indicates it recognises Malaysia as an important partner.

"It is living proof of France's new interests in Malaysia and the country feels it is important for it to further strengthen its relations with the country," he added.

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