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Strategic partnership planned with African countries

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysia, together with France and Japan, has started the groundwork for a "strategic partnership" with African countries that will enhance diplomatic relations and mutual benefits for the private sector.

Special envoy of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Tan Sri Kamil Jaafar, said today that diplomatic discussions had started and work on a framework for this partnership was underway.

"It is still at a very early stage...I cannot say too much about it," he told reporters after being bestowed France's highest award of Commanneur (Commander) by its President Jacques Chirac.

France's ambassador to Malaysia, Edouard Braine, handed the award to Kamil at a simple ceremony at the embassy in Jalan Ampang which was witnessed by Malaysian and French diplomats.

Elaborating on the strategic partnership with African countries, Kamil said this stemmed from Dr Mahathir's recent talks with Chirac and Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto.

"The partnership is not based on the concept of donor-recipient but one on strategic partnership that will bring mutual benefits for all," he added.

On the award bestowed on him, Kamil said: "I am receiving it with all humility."

Kamil, who is also the Government's special envoy to France, said the relationship between France and Malaysia had grown and reached a level which both countries could be proud of.

He said this could be attributed to the close relationship between Dr Mahathir and Chirac.

"We can now work on greater co-operation on issues affecting both countries on a global-level."

Meanwhile, Braine said Kamil was the first Malaysian to be bestowed with the award of "Commander."

The Regent of Negeri Sembilan Tunku Naquiyuddin Ja'afar had been bestowed the title Officier (Officer) which is France's second highest National Order of Merit.

Others who have been awarded the rank of chevalier (Knight) are Jamaliyah Mohd Ambia, managing director of a French bank, and Mrs Lubna Jumabhoy, honorary French Consul in Penang.

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