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Mahathir-Chirac

CHIRAC SYMPATHETIC TO MALAYSIA, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Wan A.Hulaimi

PARIS, Feb 14 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said France has easily the most sympathetic ear of all European countries to the plight of Malaysia and other Asian countries suffering from the disruptive effects of the activities of international currency speculators.

The prime minister said this soon after emerging from a meeting with French President Jacques Chirac on a sunny but bitterly cold afternoon at the Elysee Palace here.

Explaining further this cordial note of appreciation after a meeting which was extended from the originally scheduled 45 minutes to two hours of frank and honest discussions with French President Jacques Chirac at his official Paris residence, Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia had been working closely with France "for several years now" to foster this understanding.

"I think France understands Malaysia's position better than other European countries, and Chirac himself has been very supportive," Dr Mahathir said at a news conference after the meeting.

At the palace, Dr Mahathir's arrival, sharp at 6pm, was received by the armed presidential guards in their colourful ceremonial uniforms.

This was his second visit to the palace since their first meeting in 1997 when relations between France and Malaysia was strengthened by the appointment of Tan Sri Kamil Jaafar as Malaysia's special envoy to the president, a post reciprocated by France with the appointment of a special envoy to Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here straight from the four-day meeting of the G15 developing countries in Jamaica, said at the news conference in his suite at the prestigious Ritz Hotel that he was also here to convey to Chirac a special message from G15 countries.

Explaining this, he said: "The G15 countries want to participate in the formulation of the new so-called international financial architecture. How that is to be done is something else. One thing is we want direct communication with the G7 and an opportunity for discussions with them."

Describing Chirac's response to his views and those of G15 countries as "very supportive", Dr Mahathir added that France had been instrumental in persuading some other G7 countries to be more sympathetic to Malaysia's stand against the currency speculators.

"This convergence of views is not just with France and Germany. The need for control now is accepted by Canada and Japan. I think there are more countries which seem to agree with a need for control," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that it was now up to them to convince others, especially the United States, of the need for this control.

When asked if this view was accepted by Britain, Dr Mahathir replied that Britain would follow the United States.

Underlining further his theme of consultation to determine Malaysia's economic future, Dr Mahathir also called for a re-examination of "globalisation".

He said: "Even though we welcome globalisation, we feel a need to study carefully its effects so that developing countries will not lose out."

On financial issues, he said that the G15 countries now had a clearer view and a more positive stand, being all agreed that the present regime was dangerous for them.

He said that these countries were now aware that they could be rich in the morning and impoverished in the afternoon.

"They are worried that they too might have to pay the price for lack of control," Dr Mahathir said.

Besides conveying the message of the G15 countries, Dr Mahathir also had bilateral discussions on economic and political issues with President Chirac whom he described as someone who was sympathetic towards the plight of developing countries.

Malaysia was regarded by France as a country which reflected the situation in Southeast Asia, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is accompanied by Datin Siti Hasmah, flies out from here early Sunday morning for the Jordanian capital Amman before returning to Malaysia.

In Amman, he will be personally expressing Malaysia's condolences on the death of King Hussein, whose funeral last week he was unable to attend.

-- BERNAMA

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