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France-Malaysia

FRANCE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH M'SIA ON IRAQ

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 7 (Bernama) -- France is keen to work together with Malaysia regarding the situation in Iraq, particularly towards alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people, a French senator said today.

Senator Xavier de Villepin, who is chairman of the Commission on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces of the French Senate, said this was due to Malaysia's position as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

"It is very important to know the point of view of the Malaysian government because Malaysia is a Muslim country, it now belongs to the Security Council and I'm sure for the next two years we will have the opportunity to work together at the UN.

"So cooperation with Malaysia in the Council on the question of Iraq and on many other points is important for France," he told reporters after calling on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, here.

France is one of the five permanent members of the Council.

De Villepin said they had a lengthy discussion on Iraq as well as other matters like the financial and economic crisis and bilateral relations between the two countries.

"I think both our countries agreed on the fact that we have to find a better solution (in Iraq), thinking particularly about the Iraqi people who have been suffering a lot," he said.

Iraq has been slammed with crippling sanctions following its invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

And again, it had been the target of a four-day American and British air strikes last month because of its failure to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors. Skirmishes over the Iraqi airspace have also been reported recently.

"We should also try to find a new form of disarmament control, which is an important point for France, and also on the oil-for-food deal because certainly we have to think about the end of the sanctions in Iraq," he said.

Prior to his meeting with Dr Mahathir, de Villepin had talks with Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He also conveyed a message to Dr Mahathir from French President Jacques Chirac on France's optimism that Malaysia would be able to maintain its stability.

"I met with President Chirac before my departure...and he told me to tell your prime minister how France wishes to have a stable Malaysia which is important for your area and also for the world," he said.

He said Chirac was a keen follower of developments in Malaysia.

-- BERNAMA

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