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AUSTRALIA-MALAYSIA

AUSTRALIAN OFFICIAL WANTS TO IMPROVE AUSTRALIAN-MALAYSIAN TIES

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) - Paul McClintock, the new secretary to the Cabinet of Australian Prime Minister John Howard, says that he wants to bring the political relations between Australia and Malaysia to the same strong level as the other ties like business and education.

Describing the long-standing relations between Malaysia and Australia as special and deep on the ground level, he, however, said this was not reflected at the political level for the last decade or so.

He felt that education would be the core of that relationship since many Malaysians were educated in Australia.

He told a meeting with Malaysian newsmen here today that he was deeply concerned over the differences between Howard and Malaysian prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and among his main tasks in his new job was to mend the ties between the two leaders.

McClintock, a businessman who will assume office next month, is here for a week-long visit. He is also chairman of Ashton Mining, a major diamond mining company in which the Malaysian Mining Corporation (MMC) has a substantial stake, and a past president of the Australia-Malaysia Business Council.

A brief issued by the Australian High Commission here said he and his father, Sir Eric McClintock, had been active promoting close business and people-to-people ties between the two countries for many years.

"The strong trade and investment ties between our two countries owe much to their efforts and connections in both countries," said the brief.

McClintock said Howard expected him to bring his contacts into his job and among other things, to seek ways to mend to the political divide between the two countries.

He said he found Howard to be "more Asian", more courteous and more open and constructive than the previous Australian leaders.

Yet he (Howard) was accused of not being "Asian" when he was prevented from playing a more wider and active role in Asia, he said.

McClintock said Australia, which faced similar issues and problems over the question of globalisation as Malaysia, had been wrongly "lumped" with the "big guys".

"We are equally trying to find our place (in globalisation) and we are grappling with similar issues," he said.

He also said that "anything that stops us from working closely with Asia, is of great concern to us."

McClintock said he has no programme to bring about closer ties between the two leaders but he would like to see more exchanges of visits between the cabinet ministers of the two countries for a start.

Australian High Commissioner Peter Varghese who was present, said there was a need for them to explain their interest and position in the region.

-- BERNAMA

KGO SHY