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Mahathir-Chirac

DR M HAPPY WITH MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CHIRAC

By: Wan Hulaimi

PARIS, Jan 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad emerged from lunch with President Jacques Chirac at the Elysee Palace here Saturday saying that he was in better agreement with the President than with most other Western leaders.

The Prime Minister said the only thing they disagreed about during the working lunch was on the time scale for independence for Kosovo.

Emphasising this cordiality between Malaysia and France at this third meeting that they have had at the palace to date, Dr Mahathir said plans were in the offing for technological transfer with regard to the manufacturing and servicing of the Airbus.

The lunch, which lasted for almost two hours, was also attended by French Defence Minister Alain Richard and Malaysia's Special Envoy to France Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar as well as Malaysia's Ambassador to France Datin Paduka Dr Rajmah Hussain.

Dr Mahathir, looking very relaxed before an assembly of Malaysian and international press in the Salon Marie Antoinette at the Plaza Athenee Hotel, said he would prefer Kosovo to have immediate independence while France preferred to see things settled first.

Malaysia was ready to provide security and technical assistance to Kosovo and to speed up election there, he said.

On Malaysian-French relation, he said Malaysia could work very closely with France and that there would be consultation between the two countries before ASEM in Seoul in October.

Among other things discussed at the lunch were bilateral and international matters, Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said he had also extended an invitation to Chirac to make an official visit to Malaysia.

More French people should also visit Malaysia but the problem now was that MAS flight to Paris cannot deal with this adequately, Dr Mahathir said.

He said his request for more landing rights for MAS to Paris was met with the answer that the airlines saw things differently.

This was in reference to Air France's preference for Singapore and Bangkok as their hub to South East Asia.

"President Chirac sees a need. He says he and the airlines do not see eye to eye," he said, adding that Chirac had promised to look into this matter.

When asked about the Malaysian economy by a number of the foreign press, Dr Mahathir said it was recovering because Malaysia had controls in place and that he was not certain those controls could be taken away because there was no guarantee there would be no more attacks on the economy.

He said that on the whole the Asian economy was recovering but the rate of recovery was not the same among Asian countries.

Dr Mahathir gave a more direct answer to the question of his absence from the World Economic Forum in Davos than the one he gave in London on Thursday.

He said that in the original plan he was scheduled to deliver a keynote address which would have given him ample time to develop his ideas but subsequently there was a change of plans putting him only among a panel of speakers.

Dr Mahathir said this would not give him adequate time and there was no justification for him to be there.

Touching on the effect of globalisation, Dr Mahathir said he was not convinced that it was going to be good for everyone.

"We need to study globalisation further," he said.

"Globalisation is viewed merely as freedom of capital to cross borders to buy up anything money can buy and to generally stifle competition on the part of small institutions and companies. It will lead to disruption. It's not good because we're not likely to be in control of those companies, we'll be gobbled up," he said.

He said it was good that France, one of the developed countries, saw globalisation in the same light as Malaysia.

He said detractors of globalisation would be looked upon as "recalcitrant".

"Globalisation as you see recently is not very healthy for us. Some developed countries have done so well and they are pushing with all their might," he said.

When asked about Malaysia's handling of the recent economic crisis, he said that with monetary controls Malaysia was able to overcome it because the country had little debt and its financial management was conservative.

"For other countries some other mechanisms will have to be devised," he said.

Everyone accepted that there should be some reforms of the world's financial architecture in principle but what shape it would take was something else, he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was studying the Euro in view of the proposed single currency in Asean but what he had seen of the Euro so far had not been good because it had depreciated.

"We want to know what the mechanism is for a single currency. People today do not look at currencies as a means of exchange but they look at it as a commodity," he said.

When asked by a reporter from Radio France International about his successor in Malaysia, he said: "I'm as confident as can be barring some unforeseen circumstances."

He was also asked about criticism against him on the alleged use of law against political detractors.

Dr Mahathir told the reporter that he should remember that some government ministers had been sentenced and that Umno itself had been declared illegal by the courts.

He said the opposition criticised the law when it was applied against them but they forgot that in Malaysia the law applied equally to everybody.

"In the past people had been detained under the ISA without trial. Today they are being charged in full court and (some of them) have nine trial lawyers to defend them," he said.

He said he was very happy with the result of the last general election where the Barisan Nasional government retained its two-thirds majority.

"I'm optimistic we'll win the next election too," he said with a smile.

-- BERNAMA

WAH YBY