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Globalisation fears (HL)

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Paris

MALAYSIA took some comfort yesterday when French President Jacques Chirac shared Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's views on the impact of globalisation on developing countries.

The Prime Minister said he was happy that France shared the anxieties and fears of developing countries about the consequences of globalisation.

Speaking to reporters after a two-hour working lunch with Chirac at the Elysees Palace, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was glad that both countries had a common view on the matter.

"I think it is a good thing that one developed country sees globalisation in a different light."

Dr Mahathir said so much pressure had been created by developed countries for the world to globalise that it had come to a stage where one was regarded a heretic for disagreeing.

He said such a stand did not help in opening up discussions on the matter.

"There is a need for an open mind and to listen to other people's views. Our anxieties and fears are very real. And it is not about being recalcitrant."

He regretted that the developed nations were pushing the idea of globalisation with all their might without any respect for countries which were living in fear of the consequences.

"In France, we see a lot more common views on the issue of globalisation than in other developed countries."

Dr Mahathir said he and Chirac were not convinced that globalisation could benefit everyone and pointed out that South East Asia had experienced its unfavourable effects, especially the smaller companies.

He said the problem was that globalisation was only limited to freedom for capital to cross borders and to buy anything that money could buy, while stifling competition among smaller companies.

"It would seem that globalisation is leading towards oligopoly where only larger companies from developed nations dominate various areas of the economy."

He said they both agreed there was a need for various institutions and the people, not only governments and companies, who were affected by globalisation, to be consulted on the matter.

Dr Mahathir also took the opportunity to raise Malaysia Airlines' need to obtain extra landing rights and the need for more flights to both capitals.

Malaysia felt that there should be more flights to Kuala Lumpur in view of the increasing demand from travellers. "Many travellers want to go to Kuala Lumpur, but due to an insufficient number of flights, they are unable to do so."

Chirac had informed the Prime Minister that the French Government was in favour of additional flights and that "he would do something about it".

The Prime Minister said the request was made to the President because Air France was not keen on having additional flights as it considered Bangkok and Singapore its hubs and those who wanted to go to Kuala Lumpur could go via these two destinations.

The two leaders also discussed technical co-operation between Malaysia Airlines and Airbus.

On Kosovo, both leaders agreed that elections should be held at the

earliest time. Malaysia was also willing to provide training in security and administrative matters there.

On Chechnya, Dr Mahathir said both countries were saddened by what was happening there and feared the problem would not be settled before the Russian elections.

Asked by a reporter for his views on the euro currency, Dr Mahathir said the world had a very distorted view of the currency.

"We studied the euro and found it was good initially, but now it has depreciated by 16 per cent. So now we want to know what is the mechanism for a single currency and how a currency is worthwhile for trade."

Dr Mahathir said the problem was that people did not see currency as a means of exchange but a commodity which they traded in to make profits.

Explaining why he had decided to cancel plans to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos, he said: "Initially I was invited as a keynote speaker which would have given me about 30 minutes to talk about my views of things. But subsequently there was a change in plans and I was to be a member of a panel of six or seven people which would give me very little time to speak my views."

The Prime Minister also dismissed reports that he was skipping the economic summit because of ill health.

He said that he had continued horseback riding while vacationing in Argentina and was in perfect shape. "If you are not well you cannot ride 30km in one morning."

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