

# Chirac to fly in for official visit tomorrow

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** French President Jacques Chirac flies in tomorrow to repay Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the latter's numerous meetings with him in France.

The stopover is for five hours but nothing can take away the prestige involving the French head of state's first official trip to Malaysia.

It is significant to note that Chirac is coming here direct from Paris before leaving for the French territories of New Caledonia and Tahiti.

The president, who made a private visit to Langkawi in 1997, has even moved his weekly Cabinet meeting to make it here before Dr Mahathir retires in October after 22 years in office.

As it has been in their many meetings, international issues

will remain the focus of both leaders in their discussions here.

"President Chirac is coming to reaffirm France's close bilateral ties with Malaysia and to ensure our relations continue to develop.

"It is even more interesting politically between us as Malaysia is the current chair of the Non-Aligned Movement and will soon lead the Organisation of Islamic Conference," French Ambassador to Malaysia Jacques Lapouge said in an interview.

Chirac is scheduled to arrive at 6pm and start with an hour-long consultation with Dr Mahathir in Putrajaya, which will be followed by a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

There will be a banquet hosted by Dr Mahathir and both leaders will later address a joint

news conference before Chirac departs at 11 pm.

Lapouge said co-operation in the field of counter-terrorism would feature in the discussions, adding that Malaysia was an important partner for France in meeting the threat.

France's Counter Terrorism Co-ordination Unit has posted a security attache who would network with the newly set-up Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism here and co-ordinate intelligence gathering with Malaysian officials.

The ambassador said co-operation in the field of education and culture was progressing, with about 20 twinning and partnership arrangements formed between French and Malaysian educational institutions.

About 10,000 Malaysians were also taking French language classes here, he added.