

22 JUL 2003

Chirac-Tribute

CHIRAC HAILS DR MAHATHIR AS A GREAT LEADER

PUTRAJAYA, July 22 (Bernama) -- French President Jacques Chirac today paid tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for being a leader whose words and actions are guided by his true feelings and wisdom.

"Sometimes he is very vocal when he says things but it is always based on a mixture of what he feels in his heart and what he feels in his mind. And this is precisely what makes him a great man," he said after receiving the inaugural Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award from Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Office here.

"So it is very significant for me that I should receive this award from his hands," said Chirac who is here on a whirlwind visit to Malaysia.

The French leader is on his way to New Caledonia before proceeding to Tahiti to attend the South Pacific Nations Conference.

In his impromptu remarks, the president said he had known Dr Mahathir for many years and had learnt a lot from their talks which usually centred on the issues of peace and respect for others.

The award was initiated by the Malaysian World Peace Foundation in recognition of Chirac's outstanding dedication to the peaceful resolution of international conflict, courage in the defence of principle and commitment to cooperation among the nations of the world.

Prior to the presentation, both leaders held an hour-long discussion behind closed doors.

Touching on the current world scenario, Chirac, speaking through an interpreter, said what was needed now was a mechanism that could do away with unilateralism for it was important to bring about multilateralism.

"We can't accept any longer, given the changes in the world and the attitude of the people, the law of the jungle," said Chirac, who was one of the strongest opponents to the United States-led war in Iraq.

He said the voice of each individual and nation should be heard for they had a contribution to make towards the betterment of the world.

"What we need is a system in which those voices can be heard so that nobody would be sidelined, marginalised or humiliated. That is undoubtedly the foundation for peace in this world," he said.

Chirac said the world of course already had the United Nations but it may not be a perfect organisation.

"It can be restructured, modernised and brought up to date. But it is an unavoidable organisation," he said.

Chirac added that everybody should understand that when a law had been passed and decided upon by everybody, it must be applied to everyone.

Upon being presented with the award which was a trophy made from Malaysian pewter in the form of two stylised doves, the president could be heard exclaiming: "It is superb."

A beaming Chirac thanked the foundation for making him the first recipient of the award which comes with a ceremonial scroll.

He later adjourned to the nearby Shangri-La Hotel here where he received a courtesy call from Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

-- BERNAMA

MAM SR JK