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Mbeki-Malaysia

SOUTH AFRICA HOPES FOR STRONGER TIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 3 (Bernama) -- South African President Thabo Mbeki believes that his three-day visit to Malaysia has strengthened bilateral relations between the two nations and reached a new height.

He said that the signing of an agreement between the two countries yesterday to enhance cooperation in the economic, scientific, technology and cultural fields and the setting up of a joint commission to implement it was further evidence that relations between the two countries was at an all-time high.

"It (bilateral relations) should strengthen further. We have good working relations. We had the agreement as both countries wanted a formal structure (to enhance cooperation)," he told reporters at the end of his visit here today.

He said in his talks with Malaysian leaders, the two Governments also realised that there was a need to strengthen cooperation with regard to international issues like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the United Nations (UN) and peace in West Asia.

Mbeki hoped Malaysia, as the new chairman of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), would play an important role in voicing the grouses of developing and under-developed countries.

He also said that the change in the leadership of the Malaysian Government in October would not jeopardise the good relations enjoyed by Kuala Lumpur and Pretoria.

"I have known the incoming Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) for many years. He has been part of the Malaysian leadership, there will certainly be continuity in relations...there won't be any change," he added.

The South African President also said that his country was keen to see the operations of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Centre in Kuala Lumpur and "see if there could be lessons to learn as a country."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had explained to him the measures taken by the Malaysian Government to curb terrorism and South Africa wanted to draw from this experience.

He said although South Africa did not face a terrorism problem like Malaysia, it had a fair share of the problem when a small group of people bombed a few buildings in Cape Town in the past.

Mbeki also wanted closer cooperation between Asean and the African States, especially in the area of trade.

"We want to increase cooperation (between the African Union (AU) and Asean) and one of the areas we are keen on is trade. Both the AU and Asean regard this area as important," he said.

Mbeki said the AU and Asean would need to look at trade and hoped it would result in increased cooperation between the two regional groupings.

-- BERNAMA

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