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Chirac: We can't accept law of jungle (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - French President Jacques Chirac, who was here for a brief but meaningful visit, expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Malaysian Government and the people for their untiring support for world peace.

Receiving the inaugural Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Chirac paid tribute to the Prime Minister for being a leader whose words and actions were guided by his true feelings and wisdom.

"Dr Mahathir is a great man. Whatever he says he bases it on 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. "So it is very significant for me that I should receive this award from this man."

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.

Speaking on the current world scenario through an interpreter, Chirac 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.

At a joint Press conference at Seri Perdana after an official dinner hosted by Dr Mahathir in honour of Chirac, both leaders reaffirmed that ties between Malaysia and France were already on a strong footing.

But both countries needed to find ways to enhance co-operation. To achieve this, they agreed on the need for regular dialogue and greater interaction between groups in both countries, including the business community.

To facilitate co-operation and hasten the transfer of technology in the scientific and technical fields, a French language school would be established in Malaysia, both leaders announced.

Chirac was on a six-hour stopover in Malaysia en route to New Caledonia before proceeding to Tahiti to attend the South Pacific Nations' Conference.

Both leaders had earlier held a 90-minute meeting at the Prime Minister's office soon after the French leader arrived at 5.30pm at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Dr Mahathir said there was no difference in the stance of Kuala Lumpur and Paris on many international issues, adding their discussion today reaffirmed the common ground shared by both countries.

"We had a very good discussion on international and bilateral matters and have reached agreement on many issues. Politically and bilaterally, there is no problem."

Dr Mahathir thanked Chirac for stopping by in Malaysia.

"He should have been here in February on an official visit but because of events in the Middle East, he was not able to make it.

"Since his probable official visit would only take place next year, he decided to visit Malaysia while I was still the Prime Minister. That was

very nice of him indeed."

Chirac, describing French-Malaysian relations as one based on trust and friendship, said he had a fruitful discussion with Dr Mahathir on various international and bilateral issues.

On Iraq, he said both of them agreed on the need to intensify efforts to bring the crisis to an end, adding that all sides had to play their role to see the realisation of this aim.

On globalisation, the 71-year-old President said he told Dr Mahathir he shared the sentiment that it should have a human face, and that people should be integrated in a globalised world.

"We also discussed bilateral issues but they are not really issues because what we have is a close relationship and co-operation that are constantly evolving.

"We have not only economic co-operation but also cultural, technical, and social co-operation."

Chirac said they also agreed on the need to further enhance the people-to-people relationship.

"We agree that we should increase as much as possible the exchange of students."

Chirac also commented on Putrajaya, describing the Federal administrative centre as a great success and evidence that Asians could do wonders if they put their mind to it.

"This is the first time I have seen Putrajaya. The city is an expression of both modernity and culture and tradition, and it is a great success."

To a question on the role Dr Mahathir could play after his retirement, Chirac felt the world would lose a lot if the Prime Minister did not go on playing a significant role.

Both leaders were also asked to comment on the situation in Myanmar, to which Dr Mahathir said that "whatever we do, we must not think about invading Myanmar in order to achieve a regime change".

Echoing Dr Mahathir's views, Chirac responded: "I can only endorse the wisdom of that statement. I do not approve of the attitude of the Myanmar authority ...of course, I favour democracy in Myanmar and that means releasing Aung San Suu Kyi and other political opponents."

To a question on unilateralism and the need for an alternate mechanism to bring about multilateralism, Chirac, stating his country's stand, acknowledged that in today's world of heightened tension, there was a need for everybody to observe and adhere to international laws and regulations.

On whether Malaysia and France still shared a common view on Iraq now that war was over, both leaders said there was not much difference in their opposition to the goings-on in the country.

Dr Mahathir said: "We certainly believe that the situation in Iraq is not going to be easily tackled. Iraq is going through a very difficult period and what has been done in Iraq is wrong, both during the war and after."

Reaffirming the Prime Minister's concern, Chirac said: "I fully share the Prime Minister's view. I will not add anything, we have the same views before, during and after the war."

Chirac also met Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi when the latter paid him a courtesy call at the Shangri-La Hotel here.

Both leaders exchanged views and ideas on several matters affecting both nations.

Chirac left for New Caledonia at 11pm.