

19/10/2003

Dr M expresses gratitude to Chirac for his 'understanding'

PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed his gratitude to French President Jacques Chirac for his "understanding" of the OIC chairman's speech at the opening of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit here.

"I think President Chirac understands better. Anybody who reads the entire speech will understand what I said," he said at the Putrajaya Convention Centre after attending an appreciation dinner for about 5,000 personnel involved in organising the Summit.

Chirac had rejected a European Union condemnation of Dr Mahathir's speech at the OIC Summit, which was misconstrued by certain European leaders and their media as being "anti-Semitic".

"In fact, I was worried that Muslims would be against me. I never thought that Europeans would be against me.

"I can't understand them. I'm glad that Chirac at least understands. I would like to thank him publicly."

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was at the dinner, said Chirac defended Dr Mahathir because the president "understands our Prime Minister".

France blocked the EU from ending a two-day summit on Friday with a harshly worded statement condemning Dr Mahathir's remarks.

Backed by Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis, Chirac vehemently rejected a few short sentences in the 19-page summit statement deploring Dr Mahathir's comments that the "Jews ruled the world by proxy".

On the conclusion of the OIC Summit on Friday, Dr Mahathir defended his words at the opening ceremony and denied foreign wire reports that Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had apologised for his speech.

"What I stated were all historical facts," he said, adding that some European leaders were revealing their "double standards" against others.

Later, the Prime Minister said the kings, sultans, presidents and prime ministers who attended the summit were impressed by the excellent preparation and flawless organisation of the summit.

"This is our culture, not a traditional culture of us, but a newly-inculcated one which started with the organisation of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1989," he said.