

Australian PM hails Malaysia as 'vibrant democracy'
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Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd hailed Malaysia as a "vibrant democracy" after March elections that saw the opposition win a third of parliamentary seats in an unprecedented result.
MCPX

kevin rudd australia pm malaysia visit 100708 01Rudd, who is on his first visit to Malaysia as premier, said that "democracy is not just alive and well in Malaysia but flourishing."

"What has been great for us all to see in the councils of the world is the strength of Malaysia's democratic processes and the fact that these democratic processes have been tested and applied in recent elections," he said.

Malaysia and Australia have been at loggerheads in the past.

A major irritant was the jailing a decade ago of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim, convicted on sex and corruption charges that were seen as politically motivated.

Australia gave Anwar its firm backing then, but Rudd has reportedly decided not to meet with him on this visit.

Anwar, now an opposition leader, has riled the government by saying he is on the verge of seizing power.

Joint peacekeeping training

Meanwhile, the two countries said they will jointly train regional personnel for UN peacekeeping operations as part of a new level of collaboration after serious discord in the past.

Rudd said the joint peacekeeping plans, and a separate scheme to train teachers for Afghanistan, "points to a new phase in the relationship between Australia and Malaysia."

He added that the two nations' armed forces would boost the capabilities of regional nations wanting to take part in UN operations.

"Many countries wish to put up their hands and say they wish to contribute to peacekeeping operations in the world, but may not have the specific training and expertise to do so," he told a press conference.

"What we've agreed today... is to provide joint training platforms, programmes and expertise between our two armed forces for regional countries wishing to participate in UN peacekeeping operations around the world."

Rudd said the two countries will also jointly train teachers from Afghanistan, adding that development and education were vital to the country's future.

"In Malaysia we have an extraordinary exemplar, a Muslim society and a Muslim country..."

which can comfortably partner with the particular needs of the education system in Afghanistan," he said.

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