

Canberra-KL ties at all-time high

The Star - 20/5/2007

Committee of Australia's Parliament completes report on links

By PAUL GABRIEL

paulnews@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Australia-Malaysia relations have reached a new high with an unprecedented "all clear" coming from Down Under.

A special committee of Australia's Parliament has completed a comprehensive scrutiny on the state of bilateral links, reporting favourably on many aspects.

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade tabled its report on "Australia's Relationship with Malaysia" recently, after Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer directed it to

undertake the task last June.

It was the first time that Malaysia was subjected to such a review by the committee, which appraises Australia's links with different countries.

Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia Penny Williams said the findings of the report were overwhelmingly positive.

"The inquiry was done mainly to provide an increasing focus and an assessment of our relationship, and the report usefully details the multifaceted nature of our ties.

"The findings show that relations are currently at their strongest across a number of different areas,"

she said in an interview.

Among others, the committee proposed that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship review the reasons for the increasing number of Malaysians being refused entry to Australia.

To spur trade and investment, it proposed that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry adopt a more efficient *halal* standard.

The committee also proposed that Australian students be encouraged to study in Malaysia and called on universities, the private sector and the Australian government to provide financial or professional support.

"Malaysia is a strategically important country for Australia and it is important that interest and understanding of Malaysian cultures and religions be fostered among Australians," the report stated.

The committee examined the political, strategic, economic, social and cultural relationships, with emphasis on ways to further develop these ties.

Public hearings were held in several cities for interested individuals and organisations to present feedback.

The seven-chapter report was tabled in the Australian Parliament on March 26.

»The findings show that relations are currently at their strongest across a number of different areas«

PENNY WILLIAMS

