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Venue:
Date : 14-06-2004
Title: THE MALAYSIAN FRENCH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND
INDUSTRY (MFCCI) ANNUAL GALA DINNER

First of all, let me try my French and wish you "bonsoir" and a good evening.

I hope you had a pleasant journey up here to Genting and I am very glad that the Malaysian French Chamber of Commerce and Industry has chosen to hold your 12th Annual Gala dinner in my home state.

Malaysia and France have had a long and deep relationship. As two sovereign nations, both Malaysia and France have built lasting ties which have been reinforced and reaffirmed many times through the years.

In 1789, the storming of the Bastille gave birth to the French Revolution, and the words "liberte, egalite, fraternite" (liberty, equality, brotherhood) became etched in the memories of the ages. 168 years later, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, our founding Prime Minister declared the independence of Malaya, and the word merdeka now continues to echo through the years. In both Malaysia and France, the clarion call of liberty was answered with resounding affirmation.

There is a common thread running through the fabric of our two nations: the belief in the sovereignty of nations, in the value of community and in the dignity of man. The relationship between Malaysia and France is built upon this bedrock of shared belief.

The strength and depth of this relationship was in evidence in our common reaction and response to the self-appointed crusade upon Iraq. France led the charge of the coalition of the unwilling: nations who resisted the arm-twisting of powerful states intent on entering Iraq. Malaysia was also against the invasion of Iraq. We did not believe that this doctrine of pre-emptive action was in the best interests of the international community of nations. Neither did France.

In this, as well as on many other issues, former Malaysian

Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, and French President Jacques Chirac were of one mind. Indeed, the close relationship between the two leaders was a key factor in the closeness of the relationship between our two countries.

Both leaders shared a common view: that unilateralism was a threat to world peace. They both agreed that the global community is best served through consultations within multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and an unwavering adherence to international law. The closeness of their relationship was legendary, and has done much to improve the rapport between our two nations.

Tun Mahathir has since retired, and a new Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has now taken over the mantle of leadership in Malaysia. There is no doubt that our Prime Minister will continue to enhance the good relationship that has already been built between our two nations.

Moving forward, our ties with France will continue to be important to us, especially with regard to Malaysia's relations to other nations. The recent enlargement of the European Union (EU) is a big challenge and equally a formidable opportunity for us, and Malaysia will strive to work as closely as possible with the EU. Ultimately, we are confident that our relationship with France will be pivotal in shaping Malaysia's relationship with the larger EU, as well as within institutions such as the United Nations.

Malaysian-French relations are also strong between our businessmen and companies. My own home state of Pahang has been an early beneficiary of this close relationship. I recall the opening of Club Med's resort in Cherating, Northeast Pahang, in the early 80's contributed significantly to the development of tourism on the East Coast. Today, Club Med Cherating is a landmark for tourism in Malaysia, and a fine example of what can be achieved when you combine the natural beauty of Malaysia with the French touch of class.

Of course, business links between France and Malaysia are not limited to tourism. In many sectors such as electronics, retail, and defence, the Malaysian-French relationship is built upon solid business networks that have gained strength over time.

In the electronics sector, for example, I was made to understand that this year, ST Microelectronics, a major player in the global semi-conductor industry, will be celebrating its 30th anniversary in Malaysia. Such a commitment is significant, particularly with the emergence of China and India as attractive alternatives for multinational companies. The commitment of ST Microelectronics to Malaysia is truly appreciated, and I assure you it has not gone unnoticed. I am sure French companies will continue to find Malaysia an attractive location and partner in your efforts to expand around the world.

The rise of the Malaysian middle class has also benefited from the close business ties between our two nations. Thousands of Malaysians spend their weekends, shopping between the aisles at Carrefour. Many young Malaysians, seduced by the flair and style of continental cars, count Citroen and Peugeot as premium automotive brands high on their wish list.

Many other sectors in business are open to further co-operation. In education, for example, the Malaysia France Institute (MFI) provides technical training for Malaysian youths. Incorporated almost 10 years ago, MFI was jointly designed, built and managed by both the Malaysian and French Governments. With the Government's renewed focus on developing Malaysia as a regional hub for higher education, I am sure we can build on this success and explore further tie-ups with prestigious academic institutions in France.

Biotechnology is another new frontier for Malaysian-French co-operation. I am sure many of you would have read the news reports of the recent visit to the BIO 2004 convention in San Francisco by the Prime Minister. Malaysia would definitely be interested to work closely with French biotech and pharmaceutical firms to further develop our biotechnology capabilities.

Our close ties have also extended to the important area of defense cooperation. Malaysia recently purchased two new Scorpion-class submarines from French warship builder DCN, which will be delivered along with the "Quessant", a refurbished Agosta-class submarine. The Quessant would serve as a training vessel for Malaysians and would be

based in Toulon in the south of France. I am personally looking forward to welcoming home Malaysia's pioneer batch of 40 French-speaking submariners and their families once they return from their training stint in France. I hope that they will not have enjoyed too much of the good life in your beautiful country.

Malaysia is a trading nation, and our country's economic success is greatly dependent on international commerce. As a result, Malaysia values harmonious relationships with all countries that bring about mutually beneficial long term partnerships. Our relationship with France is one such example.

We appreciate France's efforts to promote multilateralism and consultations on major issues in the global arena, and Malaysia will continue to support such efforts. We believe that relations based on the bedrock of mutual respect for international norms and global institutions are the only guarantee for peace between nations.

There is a French proverb: fortune is like a woman; if you neglect her today do not expect to regain her tomorrow. To the businessmen from both Malaysia and France present here this evening, I urge you to seize the moment and seek greater fortunes together. You can be assured of my fullest support.

I hope that my attendance here tonight will serve to underline once more how deeply we value our friendship. On our part, Malaysia looks forward to building on our already strong links with France. We look forward to many more years of deep and enduring friendship and solidarity with the Government and people of France.

Good evening and Merci Beaucoup

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia