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Summit-Earth  
by Juliana Omar

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 25 (Bernama) -- There has been considerable reaction from representatives attending the United Nations Preparatory Committee conference of the Earth Summit towards Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that Malaysia may boycott the summit.

Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, said the statement even caught the attention of the Summit Secretariat which felt that the problem should be discussed at the conference itself.

However, the Prime Minister's statement was not a final decision, he said in a telephone interview with Bernama from Geneva.

Tan Sri Razali, who is heading an eight-member delegation to the third preparatory conference, pointed out that the statement was +a good tactical decision as it gives us the choice of whether to attend the summit or not.+

+There is no point going with our hands tied at the back if the focus of attention in Rio will be basically on environmental issues,+ he said. The summit will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June next year.

He hoped that the summit would be a fruitful forum for discussions not only on environmental issues but that it would also give special emphasis to development. -- more

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On Aug 16, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said there it would be pointless for Malaysia to attend the summit if the international environmental movements had already decided to oust Malaysia from the world.

He made the statement in response to a report which said that Malaysia had been chosen as the first target of international hatred and hysteria.

Tan Sri Razali said Malaysia was singled out as a target of the negative campaign organised by some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Geneva because of its determined stand on environmental issues and it was not afraid to point an accusing finger at developed countries.

He believed the campaign, a concerted effort to embarrass Malaysia +and to make us squirm and lose economically, might continue until Rio.

He said, however, the campaign was not a big issue and could be handled in due course.

The Malaysian delegation had to be resilient in facing such campaigns and continue to fight for what the country believes was important to be put forward in Rio as quite a number of countries in the North were counting on Malaysia to highlight the problem, he added.

+We are fortunate because we can withstand pressure due to the fact that we have a very able and innovative leadership and a successful position,+ he said. -- more

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Summit-Earth.3 Kuala Lumpur

Part of the campaign involved logging activities in Sarawak and the rights of the Penan community but Tan Sri Razali said there was no reason for Malaysia to become agitated about it.

He added that only a small percentage of more than 200 NCOs attending the conference were involved in the campaign while the rest appreciated the pro-active role adopted by Malaysia, especially on the historical culpability issue brought up by the South against the North.

Apart from that, the Malaysian delegation also received a lot of support from its own NCOs attending the conference which had helped to project a positive image of the country.

Tan Sri Razali said the South also had a campaign to direct attention to the North's contribution to pollution and their lack of understanding of developing countries.

He said countries in the South had a common commitment towards development issues such as financial resources and technology transfer from the North.

Touching on the drafting of the Earth Charter to be signed by all heads of delegation at the summit, Tan Sri Razali said the Malaysian delegation had been using the Langkawi Declaration on Environment, adopted by the heads of Commonwealth government here two years ago, as a basis of the charter. -- more

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Malaysia had to play a pro-active role at the conference to draw support from other countries, he added.

Care must be taken to ensure that the charter would not just focus on environmental issues without giving due emphasis on development apart from securing a commitment from the North to bring development to the South.

Tan Sri Razali said the Malaysian delegation would also stress the need to reaffirm the sovereign rights of resource-rich countries and that the question of environment could only be addressed after development issues had been worked out.

He added that no environment would be safe if the human state was in misery due to the failure to guarantee the right to development and freedom from hunger, disease and poverty.

He said there were some doubts among the delegates whether the preparatory discussions could be completed before the Brazil Summit since the North insisted on giving more emphasis to environment issues and deemphasising development issues.

+At the moment the conference is trying to frame a general concensus between the North and the South,+ he added.

The three-week conference was scheduled to last until Sept 4. The fourth preparatory conference will be held in New York next March. --  
Bernama

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