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Mahathir-Solar

PM: DEVELOPING NATIONS FACE DILEMMA OVER RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES

By: K.C. Leong

HARARE, Sept 17 (Bernama) -- The World Solar Summit here has exposed to developing nations the dilemma they face in trying to develop and use more renewable sources of energy such as solar power, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

On the one hand they are being encouraged by developed countries to use less fossil fuels because they pollute and on the other the developed nations are not prepared to help them develop alternative sources of energy, the prime minister adds.

He was speaking to Malaysian newsmen here yesterday evening after attending the first day of the World Solar Summit. He is a vice-chairman of the World Solar Commission set up to provide political leadership and guidance on the implementation of the action programme to be adopted by the summit.

Although initially some 100 countries were expected to attend the summit, initiated by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) to promote development and increased usage of solar and other renewable sources of energy, only about 80 countries have turned up, with many developed nations not attending.

Commenting on the no-show by some developed nations, Dr Mahathir noted that the United States was not present because it still had not rejoined Unesco, while Western Europe was represented only by the European Union delegate and the individual countries were not participating.

He said that the rich countries were apparently not giving emphasis to the development of solar energy although they were the ones who talked the most about using less fossil fuels and using more environmentally-friendly energy sources.

Dr Mahathir added that they were not using solar energy while encouraging developing nations to do so when they knew that solar energy was not as efficiently harnessed.

These countries also did not like developing countries using hydro-electric power, contending that it harmed the environment, he said.

"What can we do? They don't want us to use fossil fuels or hydro-electric power. They want us to use solar power but they don't want to help us in making it more cost effective to do so," he said.

"It seems to me as if they want to make things very difficult for developing countries while they continue to be biggest users of fossil fuels which pollute the environment.

"So are we supposed to use wave power and wind power which are inefficient and high cost sources of energy?" he asked, adding that low levels of energy utilisation would make developing nations poor.

He said that the absence of many developed nations here had led developing nations to conclude that they were not interested to contribute to lessening the usage of fossil fuels.

Dr Mahathir said developing nations had no choice but to be more self-reliant in the development of renewable sources of energy. "They (developing countries) have to go ahead on their own. For them it's important," he added. "Namibia for instance gets 340 days of sunshine a year and it is obvious that if they can harness energy from the sun, they'll be very well off."

He said that although Malaysia was not dependent on solar energy, it had recently become noticeable that there was increasing usage of solar

water heaters in many Malaysian houses, thus reducing usage of fossil fuels.

He was confident that other uses of solar energy could be developed in Malaysia, for example to power public telephone booths, for lighthouses and in solar-powered cars. -- BERNAMA

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