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PM-Summit

PM STRESSES URGENT NEED FOR PARADIGM SHIFT IN ENERGY CONSUMPTION

By: K.C.Leong

HARARE, Sept 16 (Bernama) -- There is an urgent need for a paradigm shift in energy consumption from simply encouraging increased energy use to more intelligent and efficient use of energy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

The prime minister stressed this when addressing the World Solar Summit, called to galvanise global commitment to increased development and use of solar and other renewable energy sources.

He was speaking as a vice-chairman of the 16-member World Solar Commission, formed to provide guidance and political leadership for the implementation of the action programme being deliberated by the two-day summit which was opened earlier by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

Dr Mahathir said the issue before the summit was to seek a better future for the world community by emphasising the importance of energy efficiency gains, productivity and improvements.

The prime minister, who described the gathering as one in pursuit of "a strategic alliance to fulfil an agenda of mutual concern", said that spreading the sources of energy must also be considered and appreciated as basic to the development process of countries.

"The question of equitable balance of growth, of equal access to amenities, of national well-being and of socio-economic stability depends on a wise and strategic approach to these important issues of energy supply," he said.

"To some marginalised communities, to those in remote locations, to those not within the range of the national grid, the issue of providing other possible sources of energy becomes not only relevant, but crucial."

Dr Mahathir added that the broader use of solar energy would be an impetus towards the creation of a better quality of life for the rural population of developing countries.

He said that despite the high cost for the initial outlay of the technologies involved in the use of solar energy, its widespread application would in the long run lead to economies of scale which would ensure the viability and significance of solar as an alternative energy source for the future.

"Let us, however, embark on this strategic approach based on the concerted effort all nations," he added.

The prime minister said a fair distribution of responsibilities between developed and developing nations had to be ensured before endeavours for a better future could be realised and called on developed countries to transfer their technologies on solar use to developing countries with minimum cost and hindrance.

"Let us not expound the glory of achieving advanced stages in the development of technologies, if these technologies are not shared and distributed to nations, regions and communities which can use them and thus narrow the development gap," he added.

"Those already benefitting from such technologies should consider it their moral and social obligation to participate and contribute in this process of sharing and transferring.

"Technologies on solar use, for instance, need to be transferred to developing countries with minimum cost and hindrance, and with intellectual rights being part and parcel of the technology transfer."

On the equally critical factor of funding, he said the possibility of

establishing a funding mechanism, perhaps in the form of a world solar fund, needed to be looked at seriously.

Commitments from financing institutions such as the World Bank and regional banks and the international community, especially multilateral and bilateral donors as well as the private sector and corporate entities, could well play a lead role in spurring the establishment of such a fund, Dr Mahathir said.

He also urged the summit to focus on developing a more effective partnership that does not require stringent and restrictive institutional arrangements, but rather one that hinges on good, pragmatic planning and "smart cooperation" among nations.

"By so doing, we shall in the final analysis, enjoy a winning edge," he said, adding: "When barriers are down and the whole world community advances, everybody wins."

Earlier, he said that with the current growth patterns of energy demand expected to continue well into the next decade, there was an urgent need to place in perspective a sustainable energy system.

The question of adequacy, sustainability and reliability of energy sources must be discussed and resolved, the prime minister added.

He said there was a need for more policy and resource focus on critical areas, including the diversification of energy sources through the application of solar and other renewable sources of energy.

"Needless to say, this issue must be seen within the context of the protection and preservation of the environment, cost-effectiveness and a widely obtainable option of conventional sources of energy," Dr Mahathir added.

The summit is expected to adopt two major documents -- the Harare Declaration on Solar Energy and Sustainable Development and the World Solar Programme 1996-2005.

The former will commit the nations gathered here to work towards the wider use of solar and other renewable sources of energy while the latter outlines some 300 projects to be developed and implemented at the national, regional and global levels over the next 10 years. -- BERNAMA

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