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Dailogue-Quotes

SRI LANKAN FM STEALS THE SHOW AT LANGKAWI DIALOGUE

By: Azman Ujang

LANGKAWI, July 31 (Bernama) -- Most international conferences will be remembered for quotable quotes from delegates, usually to enliven the monotony of serious speeches.

The three-day Second Langkawi International Dialogue which ended here this evening was no exception.

The man who stole the show was Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who also had the distinction of being the last participant to register for the dialogue, attended by 250 government and corporate leaders from over 30 countries.

Kadirgamar, who flew in only late last night from Colombo and managed only to sit through the final day session, turned out to be a "show stealer" with highly witty remarks that even Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said would be difficult to forget for a long time.

Dr Mahathir particularly liked Kadirgamar's description of the political turmoils in South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and India where the Foreign Minister said "democracy has run riot".

Kadirgamar began his speech by saying that as Dr Mahathir has just completed 15 years in office, Sri Lanka would very much like to know Dr Mahathir's secrets on how to establish stable governments.

" In India and Sri Lanka; elections are periodically held, it is customary for the government to win or lose."

" Democracy in India and Sri Lanka tends to run riot. The press is unbridled, there are all kinds of problems to tackle. How we wished that there are some islands of concensus prevailing over the ocean of political turmoils," he said, amidst laughter from the participants, who included several heads of governments and senior ministers.

" No doubt we have created vibrant and very old democracies in Sri Lanka and India but unfortunately the sole task of the opposition there is to bring down governments by spending all their time and money for this purpose," he said.

Kadirgamar said listening through the dialogue session, the concept of "smart parnership" between governments and businesses was rampantly mentioned by delegates in their quest to achieve win-win situations.

But he remarked that he was pessimistic this concept could work in Sri Lanka where the private sector was split in its support for political parties.

" Some corporations support one party while others support some other parties. There are also some who give their support to all parties," he added.

Turning to Dr Mahathir, whom Kadirgamar cited as the strongest reason why he had decided to come here even at the eleventh hour, he praised the Malaysian leader as the most pre-eminent practitioner of "smart partnership" in the world.

" Mr Prime Minister, I have come here to seek your advice on how you manage to make a highly success story of Malaysia".

He had the participants in stitches when he said: " But please, Sir do not give your advice in public."

Despite political turmoils in South Asian countries, the Foreign Minister said that under no circumstances would he think that the people in these countries would change their political system for another.

"They seem to have enjoyed it because there politics is a sport. And

may I add, a poor man's sport," he quipped.

Dr Mahathir, who chaired the closing session, said he enjoyed listening to the many quotable quotes from Kadirgamar, especially the one about democracy having run riot.

"But since the Foreign Minister wants me to give my advice in private, I won't be telling you all," he said, again drawing hearty laughter from the audience.

The Prime Minister in his closing remarks also said that the people in Malaysia were working very fast to help develop their country.

In jest, he said this was because the "the prime minister of Malaysia is very old and he wants to see result before he retires."

Dr Mahathir, who is 71, said Vision 2020 to turn Malaysia into an industrialised nation by 2020 was something which he would not be around to see.

"I won't be around by then. So if it does not succeed, blame it on somebody else," he said. -- BERNAMA

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