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Mahathir-partners

BN GOVT IS SMART PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION, SAYS MAHATHIR

LANGKAWI, July 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight described the Barisan Nasional government as smart partnership in action with the various races and parties pulling together in the same direction for mutual benefit.

He said the Barisan National coalition stressed on sharing power, consensus and giving equal representation to all parties, be they big or small, and as such, there was no question of domination by any one party.

"Membership of the National Front (Barisan Nasional) by such a large number of parties is truly smart," he said in his keynote address when opening the third Langkawi International Dialogue 1997 (LID '97) where he highlighted smart partnership in politics.

LID '97 is being attended by over 350 participants, including several presidents and prime ministers mostly from the Southern African states as well as key corporate and government officials from the world over.

"We recognise this need for sharing in Malaysia where ours is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation," he said.

However, he emphasised that, "fair and equitable (sharing) is not about absolutely equal sharing."

Dr Mahathir said Umno, the core of the 14-party coalition, has always been the dominant party and as the biggest party in the coalition, its leadership has always been accepted.

"This leadership role is real and meaningful. The leader of Umno is accepted as the leader of the coalition and is the sole candidate for the post of Prime Minister," he said.

He pointed out that this was, however, a trade-off, for there was this Umno undertaking never to rule on its own, and to heed the views and the aspirations of the other partners and ethnic groups they represented.

To add to the security among the members of the coalition, Umno, though the biggest party, actually avoid domination of the coalition by never fielding enough candidates to form a government on its own, he said.

As a further reflection of BN's smart partnership, Dr Mahathir said none of the BN component parties contest against each other in any constituency, a formula which has proven successful since pre-independence days.

Dr Mahathir said the coalition in the BN represented a smart partnership because consideration was given not only simply according who was stronger or bigger.

"It is based on fair sharing, so that even the small and the weak will get something," he said.

The smart partnership was for long term results, he said.

"Partnerships which are based on immediate sharing of the spoils cannot be considered as smart. Such partnerships are likely to result in dissatisfaction once the immediate benefits wear off as they are bound to wear off," he said.

As for the LID, which is into its third year with a similar dialogue having spawned in Botswana last May, Dr Mahathir admitted that he himself had not expected the LID "to catch on so fast and so widely."

He is expected to chair a session tomorrow morning on "Technology for Emerging Economies" as well as moderate a concluding dialogue forum on Wednesday which will be an overview of the three-day proceedings.

Dr Mahathir, recalled that in his speech at last year's LID, he had said that the smart partnership between the Malaysian government and the private sector under the Malaysia Incorporated concept was missing a third partner -- workers' unions.

He said he was happy to report that unions in Malaysia, which had so far stayed away from such alliances, had come on board this time to join the government and private sector in making smart partnership work.

Dr Mahathir said that smart partnership between the public sector, the private sector and unions was only possible "if each entity is coherent and effective".

Turning to the global scene, he took to task the big powers for forcing smart partnerships which were not smart, especially when only they stood to gain almost everything for themselves and denied the smaller nations a fair share of power, or responsibility or returns in whatever form.

"The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is a case in point as whatever competitive advantage the developing countries may have is considered as unfair and illegitimate," he said.

"Low labour costs, natural resources and stable governments are all considered as wrong or improper or unacceptable...but the competitive advantage of the powerful nations are all considered as legitimate, fair and proper," he said.

He cited how pressure was put on developing countries to open up their financial services sector, a situation which will pit the "puny industries and banks of the poor developing countries" against the rich countries and powerful banks and corporations.

Dr Mahathir told the audience of an incident where while he was explaining to a visiting group from a rich country why Malaysia could not open its financial market to them now, all that came from the group was "grudging acknowledgement followed by a request to hurry up."

Smart partnerships between nations, he said, should consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of the partners.

"It actually pays to give a handicap to the poorer partner, as for example the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP)."

By so doing, he said, the process of the poorer partners' graduation to non-GSP status would be hastened.

"and of course when they graduate they would have achieved a certain degree of development which will make them a good market for the rich," he added. -- BERNAMA

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