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Concept viewed as way forward for SADC

Jailani Harun in Kasane (Botswana)

KASANE (Botswana), Tues: The Malaysian concept of Smart Partnership is regarded as the most reliable method in addressing economic issues faced by Southern African nations.

Namibian President Dr Sam Nujoma said the very practical concept can help bring about economic progress in the region like that achieved by Asean.

"The Southern African region needs economic growth to bring about a distribution of wealth and to create opportunities for the people to make a living.

"It is necessary to empower people socially and economically in order to maintain democracy and respect for human rights.

"We see the Smart Partnership as the most effective means to improve our economies," he told Business Times today.

He was asked to comment on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's keynote address at the first Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID) last night.

The Prime Minister had told the conference that Smart Partnership can be entered into by many entities.

Apart from between government and the private sector, and among nations in a region, there can be smart partnerships between individuals, between companies, between cities and a host of others.

Smart Partnership, according to Dr Mahathir, is one way economies of the South can meet the challenges of the so-called globalisation, which in effect is a new strategic alliance among North countries to re-colonise the weak and poor.

In agreeing with Dr Mahathir's idea, Nujoma said to achieve economic growth, development corridors and cross-border initiatives through strategic partnerships are needed.

"The recent partnership arrangement which South Africa forged with South Western Bell of the US and Telekom Malaysia is an example of a Smart Partnership," he said.

Southern African nations however must first have a good educational system, develop strong work ethics, improve savings rates and reduce population growth, "and unless we develop strong social contracts and partnerships, we cannot succeed."

He urged Southern African countries to continue to dismantle barriers to trade and investment even if this may incur short-term costs.

"It is also important that a spirit of competitive cooperation is fostered throughout the region, both in the public and private sectors," he said.

Meanwhile, at the conference today, Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire said that SAID '97 will support and complement the various efforts being undertaken under the auspices of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

"We seek increasingly to develop person-to-person relationships and trust among the people of our region to build a southern African cooperative team," he told an audience including eight heads of government and some 140 captains of industry from the region and abroad.

SAID '97, he said, provides an opportunity for business and government leaders to exchange views on how they can work together as a team in promoting the philosophy and practice of Smart Partnership.

He explained that the principles of Smart Partnership were already applied within the organisations of SADC and the Front-Line States but the 12 SADC members needed to build a new identity based on the philosophy of a win-win relationship.

"Our vision now and for the next generation must be to establish a Southern Africa Inc," he said.

SAID '97 has brought together for the first time heads of state and the private sector from the Commonwealth, Southern Africa and beyond, to determine how best to cooperate in transforming the region into an economic giant.

It is organised by the governments of Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zimbabwe and the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management.

At the dialogue, Nujoma said Dr Mahathir's vision is clear enough to transform Malaysia into a developed nation.

"He is now actively encouraging Southern African countries to take the same path in development through the partnership concept."

Referring to the ubuntu spirit (I am here for you and you are here for us), Nujoma said such practice could enhance relations locally as well as internationally.

Masire meanwhile hoped that after Kasane, a series of dialogue between the governments and private sectors will be held by all SADC countries.

In his meeting with Dr Mahathir in Gaborone last Saturday, Masire praised Dr Mahathir for his success in developing Malaysia.

"Botswana can learn from this and I will be most happy if we could emulate Malaysia," he said, adding that he had already identified several private companies in Botswana which could play a role in developing the country.

At the end of the three-day dialogue, South African President Nelson Mandela, who is SADC chairman, tabled a working paper on the new path to be pursued by SADC while Masire spoke on the future of countries in southern Africa.

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