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Dr M: Smart Partnerships way to meet globalisation challenge

Azmi M. Anshar in Kasane, Botswana

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in criticising the G-7 countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for their stranglehold on poor nations, urged southern African nations last night to present a united front in the form of Smart Partnerships to check this onslaught.

Through Smart Partnerships, the Prime Minister said the southern African nations could strengthen each other.

"We are not without assets and experience," he said in his speech at a banquet commemorating the inaugural Southern African International Dialogue at the Mowana Safari Lodge.

"By exchanging our experience in economic management, we learn to do what is right and avoid the mistakes that any one of us may have made," he said. "By sharing whatever little assets we have, we can consolidate our strengths."

Heads of government and representatives from 12 southern African countries attended the banquet.

The 12 countries are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Botswana, as host, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Malawi are patrons of SAID.

This is the first time these heads of government had officially gathered to discuss shared development issues.

At yesterday's first closed-door briefing, the participants covered privatisation and how local businessmen can capitalise on it, the private sector becoming engines of national development, and Malaysia Incorporated.

Dr Mahathir also urged these countries to establish contacts and co-operation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or the Indian Ocean rim countries.

Regional organisations too can form Smart Partnerships and take a common stand when faced with "damaging proposals" from the developed North.

"This we did at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Singapore," he said. "And we prevailed."

Dr Mahathir also exhorted Smart Partnerships among the Government, the private sector and trade unions to ensure the development of a country and enrichment of its people.

Warning the South countries that the North was about to recolonise them through "globalisation", Dr Mahathir said political stability was absolutely essential for economic development, for "fending off predators from the developed North" and for preserving hard-won independence.

"We must realise that left to them, the North that is, globalisation will become another form of colonisation," he said.

"We had fought hard for independence," he said. "We had shed blood for it but we must show that globalisation, the breaking down of national borders, will result in the loss of independence."

"How can we be independent nations if we have no borders?"

Referring to the condescending attitude of the G-7 which won't even talk to the Non-Aligned Movement or G-15 countries, Dr Mahathir said this was "of course democratic" in the eyes of the North, which used democracy as a weapon to undermine developing countries.

The World Bank and the IMF, he said, lent money to developing countries and now forced them to use 80 per cent of their meagre foreign exchange to

pay the debts, leaving the states even unable to pay Government employees.

To counter the North's recolonisation, Dr Mahathir said developing countries have the ultimate weapon: "people mobility" where in a borderless world, people can go everywhere and migrate to the North in the millions.

This would happen if developing countries are not allowed a good life.

"We should migrate North in the millions, legally or illegally, if we are going to be global citizens," he said. "Masses of Asians and Africans should inundate Europe and America."

"If there is any strength we have, it is in the numbers. Three-fourths of the world is either black, brown, yellow or some combination of all these. We will make all nations in the world rainbow nations!"

Dr Mahathir said this was how globalisation would be ultimately challenged "but I hope we don't have to resort to this."

"But we will if we are not allowed a piece of the action," he said, "a piece of the cake ... if we are not allowed to prosper in a borderless world."

While there are many things that can be learnt from the North, Dr Mahathir said the North has forgotten how it succeeded and has no patience for those who do not seem to know the obvious, won't follow advice, who stumble and tumble and repeat mistakes.

"I don't want to be pessimistic, too pessimistic," he said. "There is some hope. There is hope if we can work together, if we can form Smart Partnerships, if we can help each other, if we can devise ways of mutual help for the benefit of partners."

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