

15/10/1997

Reawakening of interest in Commonwealth to face global challenges

Joseph Binkasan in London

COMMONWEALTH Heads of Government meet in Edinburgh from Oct 24 to 27 at a time when there is a great resurgence of interest in the association, within and outside the Commonwealth.

Its secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku said this reawakening of interest was no accident.

In an introduction to his biennial "Report to Heads of Government", he said the interest reflects the important role of the association in meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The Report was released here yesterday.

He said the Harare Declaration in 1991 was a turning point for the Commonwealth.

It was nothing short of a bold programme to convert the Commonwealth in a post-Cold War world into a force for democracy and good governance, and a more effective instrument for the promotion of sustainable development.

He said the emphasis on economic growth and sustainable development for trade and other links was one of the strands of the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration which Heads of Government adopted during their 1995 summit in Auckland.

The secretary-general said that at the Edinburgh CHOGM, Heads of Government would no doubt wish to consider further steps they may want to take in promoting adherence to Commonwealth values reflected in the 1991 Harare principles.

Anyaoku further reported that in addition to the growing role of Commonwealth as a force for democracy and good governance, more and more member countries recognise that there were significant economic and commercial advantages to be gained from Commonwealth links.

He said the total trade of Commonwealth countries constituted 20 per cent of global trade, and was growing, as was the volume of investment.

He urged that Governments consider the special measures required to assist countries who need help in adjusting to the new global environment and in addressing particular problems of development.

Commonwealth recognition of the benefits arising from these links is expressed in the theme of the CHOGM "Trade, Investment and Development: The Road to Commonwealth Prosperity."

The same theme will be considered by the Commonwealth Business Forum, which will be held in London on Oct 22 and 23, and which will bring together business leaders and senior government representatives.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be among the world's eight heads of government speakers at this forum. His keynote address will be on "The Key Issues For Commonwealth In Promoting Trade and Investment".

On the establishment of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group of Foreign Ministers under the Millbrook Action Programme, the secretary-general said it was an important landmark for the Commonwealth.

On the CHOGM in Edinburgh, Anyaoku said this will be hosted by Britain after a gap of 20 years, at a time of Britain's increased interest in Commonwealth links.

He said the meeting also coincides with the celebration of the golden jubilee of the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II, head of the Commonwealth.

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