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The smart way for donors, recipients

IN SMART partnerships, donors, such as countries which provide aid to developing economies, should be as grateful to the recipients as the recipients have to the donors, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said such an arrangement is more equal and does not make the recipient so obliged to the donor that it is afraid to criticise when the donor country does something wrong.

For example, when a company comes to a country to invest, the fact that the country receives it and gives it the opportunity to do business is a form of giving on the part of the country, for which the company should be grateful, Dr Mahathir said.

"On the converse, the company also must contribute to the development of the country, and that would constitute as smart partnership. It is not a case of the donor country coming with something to give, and believing that it is the only party giving and therefore has a right to have the recipient feel obliged to it.

"Both sides should be grateful because both sides are giving.

"As a result of both sides giving, both sides gain," he said at a press conference after closing the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID '97) yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said after Malaysia's independence, rich countries came and offered aid which helped develop the country. Receiving the aid, however, perpetuated some lack of independence because the receiver was obliged.

"It is not that we are not grateful. We are grateful, but when you receive something from somebody you are bound to say at least thank you, and after that you are obliged not to be nasty.

"We know that they are doing something wrong, but we kept quiet because we know we have to be grateful. I think that negates somewhat the result of struggling for many years, the blood that was shed in order to gain independence," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that was how the idea of smart partnership was conceived, so that no one party would be more obliged to the other.

The Langkawi dialogues, held annually since 1995, have led to spin-off in the form of the Barbados International Dialogue (BID '96) and the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID '97).

"These are all dialogues resulting from our new concept of partnership, rather than having donors and recipients. We feel we should continue to spread the gospel throughout the Commonwealth," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he would also like the idea to spread to non-Commonwealth countries.

"We have now developed a vehicle of cooperation, and have a better idea of how to conduct relationships with our friends, neighbours, and former donors, so that we can now develop our country and make our independence more meaningful," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because most of the participants at the dialogue started in the Commonwealth, it is only right that they should inform the Commonwealth of what has been done.

"We are going to have the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Scotland this year, and I hope we can each say a few words. I will do my bit and expect to get support from the rest who are there, so that the idea will spread throughout the Commonwealth," he added.

Asked whether the call for smart partnerships meant that regional

cooperation in some places was not giving good results, Dr Mahathir said smart partnerships are being proposed to produce better results and satisfaction to all parties.

On suggestions that next year's LID be replaced with a joint meeting at SAID '98 in Namibia, Dr Mahathir said the matter is still being discussed.

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