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Mahathir-Africa

CURRENCY CRISIS HOGS THE LIMELIGHT AT AFRICAN DIALOGUE

By: Zulkefli Salleh

SWAKOPMUND (Namibia), July 27 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today discussed the currency crisis at the Southern African International Dialogue '98 (SAID) here as African leaders sought his views on the subject.

The Prime Minister said the leaders were keen to know of recent developments in Southeast Asia, especially with regard to the currency crisis as the problem had now spread to South Africa and possibly other African nations.

"We told them that we cannot completely accept everything that came from the West. We cannot be too trusting.

"I briefed them on what happened (in Southeast Asia) and it is likely that they too are facing the problem," he told Malaysian journalists at the second-day of three-day dialogue.

Asked if SAID would take a common stand on dealing with the crisis, Dr Mahathir said: "They feel the currency matter is a major problem that requires international action, and for this there must be a stand taken by many countries.

"Although there is no consensus yet, they feel that if there is no cooperation, which they referred to as Afro-Africa cooperation, it will be difficult for countries of the world to take action."

Dr Mahathir said he and the African leaders would be able to discuss the currency crisis in greater detail at next year's Langkawi International Dialogue and at a future conference on smart partnership in Jordan.

"We must remember that while the currency crisis is a major problem, they (African countries) have other problems," he said.

Dr Mahathir said southern African leaders were now very interested in the smart partnership concept and wished to implement it.

"The African leaders appear to be very keen on the smart partnership concept. They participated very actively in the discussions held," he said when commenting on the progress of SAID.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, arrived here on Saturday after a two-day visit to South Africa.

Fourteen African nations took part in SAID, seven of them represented by their heads of state. This is the second time the dialogue is held and is modelled after the Langkawi International Dialogue which was introduced in 1996.

"They benefited from all cooperation efforts that took place within and outside the country, be it between governments, private sectors or workers, unlike in a zero sum game system where only one side benefits and the other loses out," said Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister also held bilateral talks with Namibian president Dr Sam Nujoma on Saturday, Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe yesterday, and several other African leaders.

Dr Mahathir said Nujoma was very interested in strengthening ties with Malaysia, and asked Kuala Lumpur to send its officials to his country to provide assistance in certain fields.

Nujoma also invited Malaysia to participate in mining activities in the mineral-rich country, he said.

Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkapa, in his bilateral talks with Dr Mahathir, discussed the progress of the joint-venture hydro-electric project in that country.

Among Malaysian corporate representatives at the dialogue are Malaysia Airlines chairman Tan Sri Tajuddin Ramli, Telekom Malaysia chief executive Datuk Mohamad Said and Datuk Tengku Azzman Shariffudeen of MIMOS.

The dialogue is co-sponsored by the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management Ltd (CPTM) whose chairman is Science Adviser to the Government Tan Sri Dr Omar Rahman.

Themed "Smart Partnership for Management for the Generation of Wealth in Southern Africa", it is aimed at strengthening cooperation between government, and private sectors through the application of smart partnership.

The SAID, hatched out of the Langkawi International Dialogue was first held in Kasane, Botswana last year.

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