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Dr M gives detailed explanation on S-E Asia's economic problem

Ahmad A. Talib in Swakopmund (Namibia)

THE South African International Dialogue entered its second day yesterday with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad giving a detailed explanation on the economic problem faced by Southeast Asian countries.

Dr Mahathir said the high level of participation from African countries was very encouraging and this had raised hopes for greater collaboration in future.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here on Saturday after a short working visit to South Africa, said dialogue participants were very keen to know about the Southeast Asian problems, especially the currency depreciation.

The Prime Minister said this at a Press conference for the Malaysian media just before the lunch break.

He told the dialogue participants comprising government leaders, private sector delegates and trade unionists that the currency problem had serious, far-reaching effects.

South Africa has had its currency, the rand, devalued by more than 30 per cent since May, suggesting that the currency problem is not confined to Southeast Asian countries alone.

Asked whether the SAID would come up with a plan of action to tackle the problem, Dr Mahathir said the matter would be discussed further.

He said the currency problem could not be addressed by a few countries only. It must be addressed by the international community as a whole.

Dr Mahathir said African countries had different economic problems but they found it useful to know about the Southeast Asian situation.

The Southeast Asian financial troubles have also caught the attention of G-15 countries which met in Cairo earlier this year. The issue will be highlighted at future dialogues in Jordan and in Langkawi.

The Prime Minister was happy that the Smart Partnership dialogue which started in Langkawi in 1995 had gained support from South economies.

Twenty-one countries are represented at this dialogue. There are six Presidents, a Prime Minister, a Deputy President, two Vice-Presidents, a king and several Ministers at the dialogue.

Dr Mahathir also had discussions with several African Presidents. They were Namibian President Sam Nujoma, Tanzanian President M. Benjamin and Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

Asked on the outcome of these meetings, Dr Mahathir said he discussed common problems and new ways of promoting bilateral trade. Discussions also centred on issues which may impede two-way investments and offers of help in certain areas for mutual benefits.

For instance, Dr Mahathir said, his discussion with the Tanzanian President touched on Malaysian investments in hydroelectric power generation, and invitations to participate in the country's vast mineral resources industry.

There were also invitations to Malaysian investors to participate in agricultural projects, the Prime Minister said.

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