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A simple message of hope for Third World (HL)

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LANGKAWI, Tues. - The Langkawi International Dialogue concluded today with a handful of valuable lessons learnt, foremost being that there is no "golden rule" to solve an economic crisis.

After two-days of intense high level discussions participated by people of contrasting disciplines, the LID issued what it called Message From Langkawi, a statement covering a spectrum of issues close to the hearts of the participants, most of whom come from central and southern African nations.

Though the Langkawi Message did not state it, its thrust was simple - developing countries now have a practical way of overcoming an economic crisis based on Malaysia's experience and actions in weathering rogue currency speculators, managing the crisis and how not to get IMF aid and still survive.

The tone of the Langkawi Message was a strong indictment of the IMF for the failure of its one-size-fits-all bailout conditions imposed on countries forced to seek its aid.

In a slap for the IMF, the Langkawi Message sums it in the first lesson it learnt:

- * that there are no single prescription, no golden rule or universal panacea for crisis management and resolution.

- * the particular circumstances and context of the individual countries need to be taken into account to evolve a relevant formula for crisis containment.

(See Page 2 for full text of the Langkawi Message).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as host and moderator of the fourth and final session, concluded with a message of hope for participating countries.

"We achieve the most if we work together even if we are weak," he said.

"Maybe we are poor, maybe our per capita income is small but when we add up, you will see we have resources at our disposal ... we will find we have considerable strength."

But Dr Mahathir warned that although by banding together the smaller countries could defeat overtures by rich countries, it did not mean that the latter would not "impose their will in some other way."

Asked at a Press conference later if the LID would be open to developed countries, he said for the time being, the LID will be confined to Third World countries although representatives from the First World were invited.

"We are not yet ready to take on the rest of the world," he said, "because there will be this tendency to talk down on us, to dominate, to tell us to do things. If we don't do it, we pay a heavy price."

At the same conference, which was attended by the various heads of states, Lesotho Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili reflected the sentiments of his counterparts by describing the LID as a platform where "our views could not be ignored."

"The beauty and philosophy that emerged," he said, "the creativity of the Third World ... is ours to keep."

Botswana president Festus Mogae dismissed the notion that the LID was a "big talkshow" with illusions to change the world.

"We came here only to learn how the international financial system works," he said, "based on what Malaysia experienced and suffered. And we

learnt a lot."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that ever since the Cold War ended, developing countries have lost their clout and the inability to "change sides with no options to defect."

Working on the premise, he said participants, especially the heads of governments, discussed the workings of alternative-styled Governments not rooted to democracy during one of the closed sessions.

"We cannot criticise democracy in the open ... too dangerous," he said.

"Some of these democracies are not that democratic ... cannot accept it when we say something not nice against them."

"But is the multi-party system the only system?" the Prime Minister asked.

"Surprisingly, a one-party state or even a feudal state can be democratic ... it is not too far-fetched."

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