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LID-MEDIA

JOURNALISTS' TURN TO BE "GRILLED" BY PM AT LID '99

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, July 22 (Bernama) -- How often does a Prime Minister or President get to pose thought-provoking questions to journalists in a dedicated forum like why the international media failed to recognise the affirmative action taken by Malaysia in dealing with the financial crisis?

Very often, it is the journalist who gets to ask the tough questions and is rewarded with a front-page story from the answers he elicited.

But tables will be turned on the journalists at the 4th Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) when, for the first time, they will not only get to pose questions but will also have to answer questions from world leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

And the BBC will be there to record the session to be held on Sunday.

Hundreds of local and international journalists will converge in the resort island for the four-day LID, which will kick off on the same day with the special dialogue between heads of state and government and the media.

The LID is jointly organised by the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM) and the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT).

MIGHT chairman Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman said the opening and closing news conferences would be in the form of a dialogue between the heads of state and government, their spouses, CPTM fellows and a selected group of journalists.

He said the journalists would be asked to field questions from the leaders and vice versa on the theme "Managing the Economic Recovery - The Smart Partnership Approach."

Malaysia was severely criticised, especially by the foreign media, for imposing selective capital controls, with its toughest critics saying that the unorthodox policies would further jeopardise its economy already reeling from the financial crisis.

However, the Malaysian economy is now on the mend and a one percent growth has been forecast for this year, thanks mainly to the capital controls which ensured financial stability and gave breathing room for the recovery measures to work.

Malaysia's strategy in using the smart partnership approach where the government, business, trade unions and the people worked together to haul the country out of recession and without help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would take centre stage at the Langkawi talks.

But countries such as Thailand, through its Deputy Prime Minister Dr Dupachai Panitchpakdi, and Taiwan by its Finance Minister, Dr. Paul Chiu Cheng-hsiung, would give their side of the story. Thailand received IMF aid.

Among the leaders involved in the dialogue besides Dr Mahathir would be Zimbabwe President Dr Robert Mugabe, Namibian President Dr Sam Nujomo, Swaziland's King Mswati III and Mauritius President Cassam Uteem.

Dr Omar said it has always been the case in the previous LIDs when the news conferences were used by some journalists to ask "non-LID" questions.

"This time, we will all focus on the dialogue," he told a media briefing here today on the progress of the organisation of the highly-successful LID, which has spawned similar dialogues, mostly in Africa.

Dr Omar, who is also the Science Advisor to the Prime Minister, said

the leaders, especially Dr Mahathir, would want to know how much the journalists knew about smart partnerships and the media's role in promoting it.

The facilitator for the HOG-Media dialogue will be the joint chairman of LID, Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, who is also the Chief Secretary to the Government. He will be assisted by Smart Partnership International Dialogue Co-conveners, Dr Omar and Dr Mihaela Y. Smith, the Executive Director of CPTM. -- BERNAMA

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