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Smart Partnership's time has arrived (HL)

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SMART partnership is not a new ideology or a new religion. It is an idea whose time has come, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said when wrapping up the Fourth Langkawi International Dialogue's final session yesterday.

Themed "The Way Forward - Smart Partnership in the Commonwealth and Beyond," it was attended by leaders of emerging countries, corporate leaders, government officials and economists.

"The smartest thing for us to do is to work together... when we add up all our resources, we will find that actually we have considerable strength," he said.

Given the challenges in the new millennium and the dawn of the information technology age, developing countries will need it, the Prime Minister said.

"We are going to have e-government, e-commerce and e-everything." Just when developing nations have started to learn to manage their economies under the old world financial architecture, "we are asked to discard the whole regime and go for something called electronic commerce", he said.

"Push buttons on your computer and billions of dollars can cross any number of borders around the world.

"The world doesn't have billions of billions of dollars whether in the form of gold, paper or whatever. All that happens is that the great currency traders, the hedge funds and the big banks merely pushed buttons and monies cross borders to enrich some and impoverish a whole lot of people," he said, referring to Asia's experience in mid-1997.

In a departure from previous dialogues, a declaration was issued this year, partly in response to participants' suggestions that ideas formed in the past three days be documented.

The three-page "Message from Langkawi", prepared by Bank Negara Governor Zeti Akhtar Aziz, calls for a world financial system that allows all economies, large and small, to participate in the globalisation process without rendering themselves vulnerable to destructive financial flows. It stresses the need to incorporate the views of countries with diverse backgrounds and also to involve the private sector in efforts to enhance the prospects for a comprehensive system that would secure greater stability and sustainability.

Among the lessons to be learnt from the Asian economic crisis, according to the Message, is that there is no single prescription for all economic difficulties.

In addition, liberalisation of markets, without preconditions and institutional framework, will only render countries vulnerable to external shocks.

Through smart partnerships, an international consensus can be built on issues concerning the social and economic implications of globalisation, it said.

In tackling crises, priority should always be given to safeguard the socio-economic agenda to minimise the impact on the poor and the most vulnerable, said the Langkawi Message.

Here, the concept and principles of smart partnerships can be applied to strengthen economic fundamentals of a country and sustain and accelerate the economic recovery process.

While individual organisations and institutions may have their own visions, smart partnerships can create an awareness and galvanise efforts by all parties toward the achievement of the shared vision.

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