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`African leaders looking to us'

Saiful Azhar Abdullah

ENLIGHTENED by the number of downturns and negative aspects of globalisation, leaders of nations in Southern Africa are looking at Malaysia to prepare themselves for the onslaught of globalisation.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told reporters on the second day of the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID 2000) that leaders of Southern Africa shared Malaysia's view on the impact of globalisation on Third World countries, but unfortunately "they are not in the position to say it".

"Yes, they share my view but they are not in the position to say it because many of them are under the International Monetary Fund and they owe money to the World Bank.

"And sometimes they receive aid (from these financial institutions), therefore they are not in the position to say anything but they agree with our views," Dr Mahathir told reporters an hour after delivering his speech on the effects of globalisation on the Third World at a gala dinner held in conjunction with the four-day SAID 2000 on Monday.

Southern African leaders at the dialogue - among them Presidents of Zimbabwe and Mozambique Robert Mugabe and Joaquim Alberto Chissano respectively - are banking on Malaysia to find the right approach to face the world of globalisation.

"They want to do something and that's why they are asking us on how we approach things (globalisation)," Dr Mahathir said.

At the dialogue, the Prime Minister had warned developing economies that globalisation was not merely a process, but had also become an ideology.

The leaders were told that contrary to claims that globalisation was "the ticket to a better life for everyone", it would actually inflict more harm than good on developing nations.

SAID 2000, which ended yesterday, presented an invaluable opportunity for leaders of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Grenada to learn from each other and especially Malaysia in facing critical economic and political issues.

"It is apparent that the concept of smart partnership is better understood now ... people now talk about smart partnerships and the concept of having hubs," Dr Mahathir said.

The Southern African leaders took the opportunity during the dialogue to learn how Malaysia successfully overcame the financial crisis.

"I think they (Southern African nations) learnt quite a lot because it is quite obvious that what happened to us could also happen to them ... and our experience is useful for them.

"Instead of going through the traumatic experience themselves, they could use our experience to prepare themselves from getting trapped in this kind of situation," Dr Mahathir said in response to a question by a Zimbabwean reporter on how Southern Africa could learn in terms of smart partnerships from Malaysia.

A lesson that could be learned by the Southern African nations, he added, was that they could not rely on international financial institutions to help them during financial crisis "because they are the instruments of rich countries".

"We have to depend on ourselves, we cannot depend on the help of others ... so that's the lesson that we learn ... whether it is good for others,

I won't be able to say," he added.

Speaking about SAID 2000, he said the dialogue had taken a huge step forward especially in empowering the developing economies.

"Now we are talking with a great deal of understanding about smart partnerships and we now go beyond talking and President (Robert) Mugabe was saying that the concept has encouraged remarkable development in Southern Africa," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said the dialogue was becoming "less focused on politics" as the leaders were more interested in economic development and improving the welfare of their peoples.

"Issues discussed at smart partnership dialogues are becoming wider and at SAID 2000, our focus is more on how tourism could help empower the economy in the region," he added.

Asked whether Malaysia was prepared to engage in a dialogue with G8 members to find a way to safeguard the interest of poor nations, the Prime Minister said G77 countries had tried to make some contact with the G8 "but the G8 is a very exclusive club and they are not willing to listen".

SAID entered its last day yesterday in the absence of Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister had to leave to attend the two-day South Co-ordinating Commission Mini Summit in London which begins today.

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