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LID-MAHATHIR (GODFATHER)
DR MAHATHIR SAYS MALAYSIA IS NOT A "GODFATHER"

LANGKAWI, Nov 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed suggestions that Malaysia is acting like a "godfather" to African countries participating in the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID).

The Prime Minister said the truth is that Malaysia does not have a system of "godfather" and instead member countries play the leading role whenever they host the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID).

SAID is the "sister dialogue" of LID and is held annually in Africa.

"We don't have a system of godfather, but we move from country to country and each country plays the leading role when it becomes the host," he told a press conference at the end of the leaders' dialogue of LID 2000 here.

Dr Mahathir was asked on reports that some European countries are feeling threatened by the possible economic impact resulting from LID and are accusing Malaysia of being like a "godfather" to African countries. Several foreign leaders were present at the press conference.

Dr Mahathir said when a country played host, naturally it would play a bigger role than others.

"In Maputo, Mozambique played the leading role; the same applied to Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana," said Dr Mahathir, the prime mover in the birth of LID five years ago.

Mozambique hosted SAID in August this year, while the other three African nations were the previous hosts.

Asked why other Asian countries were not included in the smart partnership dialogues, Dr Mahathir said Japan, Thailand and Singapore had participated before, but obviously the organisers cannot get all of them at the same time due to their busy schedules and other commitments.

"Supachai Panitchpakdi (Thai Foreign Minister) was here before but Thailand is busy preparing for election. Our Deputy Prime Minister also has a by-election to look after," he said.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Deputy Prime Minister, was scheduled to chair two sessions here but had to skip them to campaign for the Barisan Nasional candidate in the Lunas state by-election.

Nomination for the by-election was held today.

Botswana President Festus G. Mogae defended Malaysia's role in the Smart Partnership movement, saying that African nations were interested in some of the programmes undertaken here.

"The idea (LID) originated from here. We have links because of the Commonwealth link due to colonisation and you have multi-ethnic (society) like we have in Africa," he told the press conference.

Mogae said while African nations admired the performance of Asian countries like Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, they looked upon Malaysia as a model due to its multi-ethnic population.

"Malaysia faces the same type of problem like we do, one ethnic group economically more advanced than another and the government is trying to balance it...that's the same problem in Africa," he said.

Dialogues such as LID and SAID enabled the participating countries to compare notes and learn from each other on how to overcome such problems, he said.

"When I came here last year, Dr Zeti (Akhtar Aziz) was a Deputy Governor. Now she is the (Bank Negara) Governor. We were the first country to have a woman Governor...now I can claim you learn from us," he said in

jest. -- BERNAMA
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