

23/11/2000

It was more than just mere talk

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IT has undoubtedly, after five years of its existence, emerged as one of the most vital assemblies for leaders of emerging economies.

The curtain was brought down on the Global 2000-Langkawi International Dialogue, the 10th dialogue on smart partnership movement, in Langkawi on Tuesday.

It took the host, patron and adviser Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad less than 30 minutes at the end of the dialogue to sum up to the Press what transpired throughout nearly 30 hours of networking and intense dialogue behind the closed doors of the Matsirat ballroom at Berjaya Langkawi Beach & Spa Resort.

The outcome was immeasurable and would certainly have an impact on the more than half a billion population of 19 participating countries.

Some senior officials were taken aback by the comments of a member of Zimbabwe's National Consultative Economic Forum, Dr Ruth Labode, on the sidelines of the dialogue.

They felt that some European nations, feeling threatened by the possible economic impact resulting from the dialogue, were worried that Malaysia was becoming like a "godfather" to African countries.

Perhaps these officials were concerned that such a statement could steal the limelight from the dialogue.

But in reality, the dialogue has proven that it is not a place for leaders of the South to exchange pleasantries like some international conferences.

It is more than just a dialogue, it is about strategising.

They discussed how to handle the adverse effects of globalisation and prevent developed economies from dominating the global economy, and most importantly, fighting the marginalisation of emerging economies.

The leaders made it clear that it was far from their minds to distance themselves from developed nations.

The explanation of Dr Mahathir and President of Mozambique Joaquim Alberto Chissano should ease the worries of developed countries.

Dr Mahathir stressed that Malaysia did not have a "system of godfather" while Chissano stated that the Western countries should have nothing to worry because the LID and Southern Africa International Dialogue were "not against anybody".

Probably what worries the developed countries was the determination of the emerging economies to fight the globalised world.

Smart partnership aside, globalisation was one of the core issues discussed over the round tables.

Dr Mahathir spoke on globalisation and its implications during the opening day of the dialogue on Sunday.

At the end of the day, the participants, particularly from the African nations, were more or less convinced of the effects of "globalisation".

They also acknowledged the need to have "ammunition to prepare for the battle".

Hence, the proposals to set up a special team to keep tabs on the globalisation process.

The suggestion list is growing.

The participants also agreed that they need to increase the level of preparedness to minimise risks and take advantage of the opportunities arising.

Countries should use all sources of information to educate and create awareness of globalisation and its implications, while information management should be a central feature of any Government programme.

It was also suggested that emerging economies should convince global economic powers to re-look the globalisation aspect.

Although it is probably impossible to turn the tide of globalisation, it is still possible to influence the superpowers to re-evaluate specific aspects of globalisation that have undesirable effects on emerging economies.

"There are many ways to skin this cat (to take the approach of educating the world)," Danaharta's Azman said, citing an example of Malaysia's efforts to demonstrate the dangers of unchecked free flows of speculative short-term capital.

The way the western media is portraying the emerging economies is a cause for concern.

And this is the reason why the heads of State and Government of smart partnership members agreed to set up an alternative news source to provide accurate, balanced and objective reports of local events and developments from a local perspective.

They wanted distortion and lies presented by existing news agencies on developing nations to be countered.

The alternative news source, as explained by Dr Mahathir, was never aimed at competing with the existing sources and channels.

Its existence is merely to balance the news originating from other services.

The recognition from smart partners that social issues such as the eradication of killer diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria must figure on agendas of future dialogues, also speaks volumes of how LID has evolved.

The impact of these ailments in crippling emerging economies, especially those which need to play catch-up with challenges of the New Economy, is one which can no longer be swept under the carpet.

By forging smart linkages and identifying strategies in fighting these scourges, Southern African nations can rest in the knowledge that the affirmative action taken in the new millennium, either through discovering an HIV/AIDS antidote through traditional medicines or making a breakthrough in finding a safer pesticide alternative for DDT to fight malaria, will yield benefits of great impact.

These actions would not only be instrumental in saving millions of lives, but more importantly, the lives of future generations which now risk being wiped out completely before the turn of the next decade.

Credit must also go to the First Ladies of Smart Partner countries for their diligence in working behind the scenes and their ability to make an impact in taking these social issues to the highest plane of the dialogues.

These spouses of the leaders have definitely come a long way since the 1995 LID when their role in the dialogues was merely limited to field tours, shopping excursions and indulging in small talk over afternoon teas.

The first leg of the Global 2000 at Maputo in Mozambique this year saw these ladies get down to dealing with issues like killer diseases, hunger and poverty eradication which today have found their place in the blueprint for success of the smart partnership model.

The inclusion of youths as new smart partners in future dialogues is another far-sighted and commendable decision.

As voices of the future and stakeholders in the New Economy and its related challenges, it is only befitting that the young are empowered to participate in certain policy-making processes of governments.

These young minds whose opinions are usually not sought or taken lightly, are in actual fact mini "factories" of innovation and wisdom who deserve to be invested in.

The numbers of these youths are far too big to ignore (Nigeria boasts a population of under-15 youths exceeding 40 million).

Failure by today's leaders to involve their successors when planning for tomorrow, will be an injustice to future generations.

Smart Partnership, as quite eloquently phrased by dialogue partners, is all about people.

So who, if not the people of the future, are most deserving of saying their piece on the kind of world they wish to live in.

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