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LID-PULSE

LID: PR GURU HAILS LID SMART PARTNERSHIP MOVEMENT

By: Yong Soo Heong

LANGKAWI, Nov 19 -- If one wonders what the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) has achieved so far and wants to put a finger on the pulse, then Harvey Thomas is perhaps one of the select few who can point you in the right direction.

Thomas, a public relations and presentation consultant, has been to every LID since it started five years ago.

And he is not your run-of-the-mill consultant: he dispenses advice for those at the very top -- presidents and prime ministers.

For more than a decade, Thomas was public relations officer for the Conservative Party in Britain and provided PR and presentation advice to former British Prime Minister Dame Margaret Thatcher.

He even survived an attack by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) on Oct 12, 1984 when a bomb meant for Thatcher exploded under his bed. He has lived to tell his tale despite falling five floors and being pinned under the rubble for two hours!

The 61-year-old PR maestro even wrote a book, "In The Face Of Fear" to recount his ordeal but Thomas has a public relations manual published in 1995, "If They Haven't Heard It-You Haven't Said It".

By virtue of his association with the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management Ltd (CPTM), he is actively involved with LID as a resource person. And he knows exactly what is happening around the dialogue and what needs to be done for it to be relevant.

First and foremost, Thomas, who used to work for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, has been converted by the concept of smart partnership, which he says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been the source of constant inspiration.

Thomas feels that there is a lot of moral in the dialogue's practicality and its immense networking potential is beginning to happen.

"It has to emerge into something on which you can put a measurement on," he said.

Having said that, he was asked a hypothetical question: If the LID were to be a 400 metres race, at what stage are its participants?

Taking a cautious approach on the matter, Thomas said Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman and Datuk Dr Mihaela Smith, the two leading lights of LID, would probably say that they are at the 50-metre mark, or even at the first 85 to 100 metres.

That may be seen as painfully slow by some. Thomas is unperturbed as he feels that people are just beginning to understand the concept.

"But the real power, the real building up and the real fast movement is going to come in the next 300 metres as if it's a 400-metre race," he says. Thomas emphasises that his likening of the LID participants at the first 50 metres or equivalent to the first five years was said as a compliment because of the depth and extent of the smart partnership vision for the future and not as a criticism.

This is because the whole extent of where smart partnership can go is really enormous and that Dr Mahathir, Dr Omar and Dr Smith can take pride in what has been achieved so far in terms of bringing people together to work for everybody's benefit.

In examining the cautious steps towards smart partnership, Thomas says it takes time for people to warm up to a new idea.

He believes that in most normal business deal scenarios, there would be

one party trying to make the other lose and vice versa.

"The objective of smart partnership is for them to say, 'Hey, wait a minute, we can both win here. What is more, we can not only win ourselves but we can make a significant contribution to the economies of our countries." Thomas strongly believes that beyond the tangible issues, there is also a lot of the latent intangibles at work behind the scene like networking between leaders, businessmen and government with the private sector which have the power to transform into tangibles.

But for this to really happen, Thomas says the achievements ought to be amplified in a coherent manner.

Although most of the discussions and deals are on a one-to-one basis, Thomas feels that proponents of smart partnership should be alive to the idea to use the media to effectively communicate with a great majority of the people.

Given that Thomas has been involved in the execution of various successful PR programmes, he knows what he is talking about.

And he feels that the various themes and actions resulting from the dialogue should be moved forward and measured, not necessarily in cash terms, but expounding the tangible and intangible benefits resulting from such "win-win" situations. -- BERNAMA

SHY YBY