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Mahathir-St Lucia

MAHATHIR CALLS FOR CONSOLIDATION TO FACE WTO TALKS

PUTRAJAYA, May 10 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight expressed hope that Malaysia, St Lucia and other developing countries will strengthen consultation and dialogue to effectively pursue their interests on the international stage.

He said ability to forge an effective South-South consensus for developing countries to speak with one voice and coordinate their positions would be crucial in the context of the new round of negotiations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"There is a real fear that the new round could severely disadvantage developing countries," he said at a dinner in honour of visiting Prime Minister of St Lucia, Dr Kenny Anthony at Seri Perdana, here.

Dr Mahathir said developing nations were being asked to remove the safety net they had in place to protect their economies with no guarantees that they would gain anything substantive in return.

He said as a small developing country, Malaysia had always been keen to strengthen relations with other developing countries, deeming it of strategic importance.

"We have seen how small developing countries are often ignored and sidelined at important global conferences and negotiations on trade, finance and other critical issues.

"We are acutely aware of the raw deal you had in the banana trade," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's involvement with South-related international bodies did not signify that it was Kuala Lumpur's desire or intention to seek confrontation with the developed countries.

"What we are striving to achieve is a fairer system of consultation and decision making in which the interests of both developing and developed countries can be given appropriate consideration," he said.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said Malaysian businessmen would be encouraged to consider investing in the tourism industry of St Lucia, the Caribbean island he visited in 1991 and 1999.

He said Malaysian universities, particularly those specialising in information technology, were open to St Lucians.

"I believe that Malaysia can offer the young people of St Lucia a conducive, friendly and competitive environment to pursue their higher education at fees which are very low and competitive," he said.

Dr Mahathir said studying in Malaysia would expose the people of St Lucia to the dynamics and the vast economic potential of the East Asian region.

This country, he said, was also ready to cooperate with St Lucia under Kuala Lumpur's Technical Cooperation Programme.

Dr Anthony's visit, which includes a trip to the legendary island of Langkawi, ends Saturday.

In his reply, Dr Anthony said St Lucia was keen to learn from Malaysia's experience in development in particular the country's progress in agriculture.

He said his country was also taking steps to diversify its economy so as not to be totally dependent on banana export and agriculture.

Dr Anthony said one of the areas that could be developed was the tourism sector.

He commended Dr Mahathir for displaying "great courage and wisdom" in

his effort to turn Malaysia into a developed country.

-- BERNAMA

SLR MAM RYN