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SAID-UGANDA

STRONG INTEREST IN AFRICA TO CRYSTALLIZE SMART PARTNERSHIP

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KAMPALA, Aug 17 (Bernama) -- Just last week, the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM), the organisers of the sixth edition of the International Smart Partnership Dialogue-Global 2001 in Uganda which begins here on Saturday were finalising arrangements for about 350 participants.

But, with just one day to go before the dialogue, they have a logistical nightmare on their hands -- registration for participation has shot up to 700 delegates mostly from the hosts, Uganda and other African states.

"Managing such a large number of people in a dialogue format can be challenging," says Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, the chairman of CPTM and Coordinator for Special Projects to the Prime Minister.

Nevertheless, he concedes it reflects the great interest churning in Africa to explore the concept of smart partnership in greater depth.

The brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and premised on a "prosper thy neighbour" policy, smart partnership was first espoused at the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1995.

Since then, it has caught on in Africa through the last five editions of the dialogue in Southern African nations, and now the sixth -- for the first time moving to East Africa -- bears testimony to the fact that smart partnership brings tangible benefits to those who embrace it.

Uganda, under President Yoweri Museveni, wants to extract maximum gains from the get-together, especially in learning from the experiences of other countries in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), crucial to the economy, via smart partnerships.

A key first-time attendee is Commonwealth secretary-general Don Mckinnon.

Conducted as always under an informal format, the dialogue will be held at the Speke Resort, Munyonyo Village, 15 km outside the Ugandan capital.

Dr Mahathir, who arrives here Saturday together with Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali after completing an official visit to Yemen, will lead a sizeable Malaysian delegation to the resort to brainstorm with others on how, working together, they can prosper in a myriad of areas, including trade and investment, education, rural development, media and information and communication technology.

Malaysia will share its experience in enhancing the entry of FDI and in tackling bottlenecks associated with FDI, since it plays such a crucial role in providing much-needed support to lagging African economies.

Dr Omar said on Thursday a major challenge given the large gathering would be in managing a good mix of people so that there exists a cross-fertilisation of ideas, and in identifying the role of players so that they would be able to catalyse and get the dialogue going.

A major event at the dialogue would be the launching on Monday of the Smart News Network International (SNNi), an exchange on news from and about developing countries and accessible through an Internet portal, a reflection of a successful smart partnership venture between media organisations.

Through SNNi, several African media organisations plus four from Malaysia, including the national news agency Bernama, the New Straits Times, the Star and Utusan Malaysia, would contribute news items to the portal.

Another important area of discussion would be social development, where Dr Siti Hasmah, given her active stand on global social issues, was invited personally by Uganda's First Lady, Mrs Janet Museveni, to lead discussions in the social issues group.

Dr Siti Hasmah would focus on education, rural development and poverty eradication, in which Minister for Rural Development, Datuk Azmi Khalid, is expected to make some presentations.

Others in the Malaysian delegation expected to take part include Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, Science Advisor to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Dr Ahmad Zaharuddin Idrus, Bina Puri Holdings group managing director, Tan Sri Tee Hock Seng, and Telekom Malaysia chief executive officer Datuk Dr Md Khir Abdul Rahman.

The gathering ends on Tuesday with participants expected to provide inputs to a mission statement on the way forward for effective smart partnership for developing countries. -- BERNAMA

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