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Facing challenges of globalisation

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THERE were no concrete proposals or conclusions from the Global 2002 - International Smart Partnership Dialogue in Langkawi which ended on Saturday.

But the message is clear.

The dialogue has been meaningful to the participating countries and should continue to become a platform for the developing and Third World countries to come together and seek ways to face the challenges of globalisation.

The dialogue, it seems, has become more pertinent following the Sept 11 attacks on the United States, and the emerging spectre of "economic terrorism".

Besides military terrorism, developing countries now have to contend with economic terrorism, which an economist had described as more damaging than armed terrorism as its impact extended to the entire nation and not to just a few hundred people.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his opening speech, had warned poor and developing nations they ran the risk of ending up in the doldrums economically if "economic terrorism" was not dealt with.

Noting that "economic terrorism" took various forms, Dr Mahathir cited an example where a country had drawn a major investment away from Malaysia by offering US\$200 million (RM760 million) and other perks to the prospective investor.

Leaders and participants of the dialogue took note of Dr Mahathir's remarks, and agreed they had to be united in facing these challenges.

As one economist said, developing countries had to be of one voice to counter negative implications at the international negotiation table.

The smart partnership dialogue is one of the platforms.

Furthermore, since the first Langkawi International Dialogue in 1995, later alternating with the Southern Africa International Dialogue, the smart partnership dialogue has been held every year.

The continuation of the dialogue shows its importance in forging cooperation and collaboration among developing countries, particularly the African nations and Malaysia.

Leaders of participating countries agreed that the dialogue had benefited them. It has been useful in terms of exchanging experiences, no matter whether a country is facing problems or has achieved success.

Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said, had benefited a lot especially when the country hosted the smart partnership dialogue.

In fact, under the smart partnership concept, many Malaysian investors have made their presence felt in Africa.

Telekom Malaysia Bhd, which has been sponsoring the dialogue for several years, has been in the fore-front when it comes to investing in Africa.

Petronas is the other Malaysian conglomerate that has been actively seeking opportunities in Africa.

In view of the effectiveness of the dialogue, more countries and non-Commonwealth members are keen to participate.

But this, said Commonwealth Partnership Technology Management Ltd chairman Tan Sri Omar Abdul Rahman, depended on the host nations. It was for them to decide whether to expand the number of invitees, he said.

CPTM is the joint organiser of the smart partnership dialogue.

At the Langkawi dialogue, four new dialogue members were invited. They

are Mauritius, Seychelles, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.

All of them are looking forward to work with other participating countries and hope to benefit from the dialogue.

For instance, Kyrgyzstan was so inspired by Malaysia's experience in managing its economy that they have named their own economic policy the "Dr Mahathir's national economic policy" which takes Kyrgyzstan's development right up to 2010.

And throughout the dialogue, Kyrgyzstan looked for answers from Malaysia and the other countries which could be implemented in the country.

But one question raised during the dialogue in Langkawi was whether the smart partners dialogue would lose its appeal once Dr Mahathir retires as Prime Minister in October next year.

No matter, leaders of participating countries want him to continue to support and play a key role in the smart partnership dialogue as Dr Mahathir has been instrumental in ensuring the continuation of the dialogue.