

03 AUG 2002

MAHATHIR-Africa

LID WILL CONTINUE TO INVOLVE AFRICAN NATIONS, SAYS DR M

By: S.Retnanathan

LANGKAWI, Aug 3 (Bernama) -- Participation in the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) would not be extended to countries other than those from the African continent, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said there were no such plans to include countries from other regions.

"If you bring in too many countries, it will paralyse the dialogue. You can't get so many heads of state coming together at the same time, knowing that in one year there are seven or eight heads of state meetings and there are only 12 months a year, which means almost every month we would meet."

Dr Mahathir said inviting leaders from other continents was not feasible as it would be impossible to match the different timetables of the leaders.

He made these remarks at a press conference on the sidelines of the Global 2002 Langkawi International Dialogue (Global 2002 LID) which ended today on this island resort after three days of smart partnership dialogues.

On the Global 2002 LID, he said the dialogue session was more diversified, with more activities where participants were able to interact more freely, unlike the usual dialogues where participants presented long papers for discussion.

"As you can notice, people come up with very short remarks followed by discussions from the tables and reporting back from the tables and we have been able to cover a very large area (of issues)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the activities at Global 2002 LID were particularly useful for developing countries as they could learn from others who have had similar experiences.

He said LID was useful for Malaysia as well because local businessmen and the government officials could learn more about the problems faced by African countries.

"Actually we don't have any classes for prime ministers and presidents, they don't attend classes but this is as near as having a class where they can learn something about their jobs," the prime minister said.

Asked how Malaysia had benefited from Global 2002 LID, he said the country gained a lot as it was in the best position to make use of the knowledge gained at the dialogue.

"We have learnt a lot. In order to do business with people we must know what is their policy and what is their law, we also have to know the leaders.

"I would say we benefited the most, which is not something we planned for. Although they (the participating African countries) are interested in doing things, their own capacity is limited so they want to learn from us," he said.

The prime minister also said he was still dissatisfied with the level of co-operation among the countries of the South.

"I am still not very satisfied in particular on various issues we are interested in. Among the Islamic countries, for example, we cannot reach consensus on what to do about Palestine," he added.

On the issues discussed at bilateral meetings with leaders attending Global 2002 LID, Dr Mahathir said he spoke to the heads of state and governments on LID and its future.

"More people are interested in this meeting (LID). This year (leaders from) Kyrgyz came, Rwanda came...those who are not members are interested in participating at LID. We also spoke on how to finance the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management (CPTM)," he added.

Asked if he would attend the next LID, Dr Mahathir said: "I will come if I am invited."

Dr Mahathir, who is the host patron and adviser to Global 2002 LID, would resign as prime minister after October next year.

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