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Mahathir-Tribute (Dialogue)

FORMER COMMONWEALTH SEC-GEN PAYS TRIBUTE TO DR MAHATHIR

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

MBABANE, (Swaziland), Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Former Commonwealth secretary-general Sir Sridath Ramphal has paid tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his immense contributions towards enlightening the Third World on global issues especially those pertaining to trade.

Ramphal, in paying tribute to Dr Mahathir, described the Malaysian Prime Minister as a "hero of the developing world" for having spoken with passion and credibility especially in championing the interests of the Third World.

In comments made during preparatory informal talks prior to the holding of the Global 2003 Smart Partnership Dialogue in Euzulwini, near here, the veteran and articulate Sri Lankan diplomat said that Dr Mahathir knows first-hand the experience from globalisation taking into account his knowledge and insight into issues.

Officials involved in the preparation told Malaysian journalists that the comments were made in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and how the Prime Minister could enlighten the other developing countries in trade issues.

Dr Mahathir, in numerous speeches had consistently insisted for an equitable trading regime under the WTO, and not something that is forced on helpless developing countries under the guise of opening up markets via globalisation.

He had also said that globalisation was only benefiting the rich countries at the expense of the poor which was why developing countries need to come together and put on a united front on global trade issues.

Some officials in the know about trade and investment issues here said that there were fears that the four-day WTO Ministerial Meeting beginning on Sept 10 in Cancun, Mexico, was going to collapse.

Reports describe the United States and Europe as having taken a very hard stand on some negotiating issues such as the production and manufacture of cheap drugs to combat HIV-AIDS, for instance in Africa.

Although the US and Europe agreed at the last ministerial in Doha to allow African countries to produce these badly-needed drugs cheaply, they were now backtracking on their Doha commitments, coming under pressure from powerful pharmaceutical lobbies.

They are now insisting African and developing countries to buy the expensive drugs, something impossible simply because impoverished Africans just cannot afford it.

"The US and Europe are backtracking and people are dying here," an official who requested anonymity said.

Even in the sensitive area of agriculture, both the US and Europe were increasing their subsidies to farmers, thus making it impossible for African farmers to compete on an equitable manner with heavily-subsidised American and European farm products.

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