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DIALOGUE-SWAZILAND

LAST SAID DIALOGUE FOR DR MAHATHIR AS PRIME MINISTER

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MBABANE (Swaziland), Aug 11 (Bernama) - For regular participants of the Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID), this week's gathering here is likely to be a significant and emotional one as it will be Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's swansong in the smart partnership movement in his capacity as Prime Minister of Malaysia.

It was Dr Mahathir who championed smart partnership, the clarion call of developing countries wanting a "win-win" situation based on a prosper-thy-neighbour relationship with partners.

Sceptics to smart partnership among nations were many when the concept was first mooted at the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1995.

But since then it has garnered more believers as evidenced by the consistent frequency of LID on the Malaysian resort island while similar editions were also held among Southern African countries on the African continent.

In 2001, the dialogue moved to Uganda, which was an achievement of sorts as it was the first time it was held in an East African country.

Dr Mahathir will arrive here on Wednesday after ending an official visit to Algeria early Wednesday morning for SAID, which will be officially opened by King Mswati III at an official dinner later that night.

SAID will be held at the Ezulwini Dialogue Village, a few kilometres outside the capital city here.

There are questions as to whether the LID will be continued after Dr Mahathir steps down as prime minister but the official programme issued to Malaysian reporters already includes a mention of a dialogue next year in Langkawi.

Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister's special representative and chairman of CPTM Ltd, the London-based organisation which organises the dialogue, said this year's meeting here would yet again discuss serious developmental issues affecting countries globally and in particular, African countries.

Security, technology, K-economy and regional issues will be among the topics to be discussed at the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue from Aug 13-17 here.

Dr Omar told reporters recently that the dialogue would enable networking and facilitating the philosophy of smart partnership.

"During the dialogue, we always discuss smart partnership perspectives in relation to global issues which are current," he said.

The question of security is expected to take on added significance following the bomb blast at the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta last week which killed more than a dozen people.

Dr Omar said security was still considered to be a major concern because global security would affect local and regional developments in South African countries.

As for technology, he said the chief concern would be that of genetically modified (GM) foods or crops.

"There is a global debate on GM because it concerns the interest of developed countries and in such debates the needs of developing nations are hardly considered," he said.

On the K-economy, he said discussions would revolve on how to benefit from this and for Malaysia to share its experience in dealing with it, in particular, the establishment of an advisory system to alert government and

the public sector with changes in the economy.

Besides the global perspective, issues of local interest in relation to Swaziland are likely to surface during the dialogue, especially pertaining to the country's current affairs.

Meanwhile, Dr Omar said SAID had received encouraging response from King Mswati III, who has shown keen interest in the dialogue, and was personally and actively involved in streamlining the programmes.

Dr Omar said, at the last count, about 12 leaders would be attending the dialogue, including Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe. -- BERNAMA
MR/SHO KTC SHY