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MALAYSIA-MAP

SMART PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUES HAVE PUT M'SIA ON WORLD MAP

By Mikhail Raj Abdullah

EZULWINI. (Swaziland), Aug 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that he is happy with the smart partnership dialogues initiated since 1995 in Langkawi and they had spawned six similar editions in Africa.

These dialogues, he said, had enabled Malaysia to earn international respect with more people now taking it seriously compared with the earlier years when many did not even know where it was located geographically.

"It's not personal, I'm happy that I've done my job -- people know Malaysia better as the dialogues have made Malaysia to be known better in Africa and elsewhere," he said when asked on his personal feelings on the outcome of the Global 2003 Smart Partnership International Dialogue at a press conference since he would be stepping down as prime minister in November this year.

Dr Mahathir said not too long ago people only knew Malaysia as being near Singapore, China or India and within the South-east Asian region itself, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand were even more well-known.

In international fora and conferences, he said "we had to explain (to people) where Malaysia was, but now they know exactly where the country, thanks in a big way to such dialogues and the Petronas Twin Towers."

He added, "I feel satisfied that people respect Malaysia internationally and take it seriously (now)."

King Mswati III of Swaziland, who hosted this year's three-day dialogue, said the next Southern African International Dialogue (SAID) would be held in Zambia.

Dr Mahathir said the Africans were so keen on the dialogues as they knew the benefits of smart partnerships and had even protested when suggestions were made by some quarters in Malaysia that the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) be stopped.

He said the next LID would be held in July or August next year.

This year's dialogue had the largest number of heads of government attending, with eight from Africa and Dr Mahathir himself. It also had the largest number of participants with more than 800 people from 16 countries.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had fostered close ties with not only African countries, but also those from the Caribbean, Gulf region and Central Asia through its friendly and prosper-thy-neighbour policies as opposed to superpowers like the United States which exerted pressure on developing countries.

During the dialogue, several leaders expressed concern over the relegation of multilateral agencies such as the United Nations and that unilateralism was taking prominence as evidenced by the United States attacking Iraq.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders who attended the just-concluded dialogue wanted the UN to be revised via the smart partnership concept and restore the credibility of the world body.

Asked on the outcome of bilateral talks he had with King Mswati III earlier in the day, Dr Mahathir said Swaziland was keen to work closely with Malaysia.

He said the king was keen to learn about Malaysia's methods in resolving certain issues like constitutional reform which the kingdom was currently undertaking.

On the sidelines of dialogue, Swaziland's Minister for Enterprise and

Employment Senator Ludfo Dlamini signed a memorandum of understanding between his country and Gabungan Dwi Vista Sdn Bhd. The Malaysian company represented by its managing director, Norlyne Basir.

The MOU covers the export of palm by-products from Malaysia to Swaziland, promotion of technology in the manufacture of environmentally-friendly by-products related oil palm trunks, plywood & veneer, chipboards, mats from oil palm, rubberwood and particleboards.

Another MOU was signed between Swaziland and Travellyne & Tours Sdn Bhd to promote tourism activities in the kingdom, including promoting inbound travel between Swaziland and the Asia Pacific region, education of culture, tradition and skills, and knowledge transfer.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the progress of the Smart News Network International (SNNI), a news consortium participated by the Malaysian national news agency, BERNAMA, The New Straits Times Press Bhd, Utusan Melayu and The Star Publications on the Malaysian side and several African media organisations from Uganda, South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. SNNI was launched at the last SAID in Kampala, Uganda.

Dr Mahathir said one of the weaknesses on the African side was that media organisations there were mostly controlled not by locals but rather by foreigners.

As such, they were not too keen to join the news networks of developing countries, he said.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said smart partners should encourage more of their media organisations to participate in the SNNI.

Meanwhile, in a statement issued on "The Way Forward from Ezulwini, the leaders who attended the dialogue said traditional values and practices should be maintained.

They also said good practices should be kept and that "we should not be afraid to discard what is bad or to take from the outside what is new and can help us."

The statement also said education was the key to tackling poverty and health issues.

Besides this, it described the New Economic Partnership for African Development (Nepad) as an important African project to mobilise resources and it should be supported and translated into specific projects.

And to complement big infrastructure, communications, energy projects such as those witnessed in the Spatial Development Initiatives (Economic Corridor), the statement said smart partners should encourage "micro projects" which often command fewer resources but respond to important specific needs. -- BERNAMA

MR SHY