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SAID-SWAZILAND

SWAZILAND AIMS TO MAXIMISE BENEFITS FROM HOSTING SAID 2003

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

MBABANE (Swaziland), Aug 12 (Bernama) - Swaziland aims to maximise the benefits from hosting the Global 2003 Smart Partnership Dialogue through the betterment of its people via spillover economic activities, especially in the services sector and enhanced linkages with regional neighbours.

Its Minister for Economic, Planning and Development, Prince Quduza, said that while the smart partnership dialogue "need not necessarily put food on the table," it was nevertheless a vital tool in forging closer links between the government, labour and the private sector.

He told Malaysian journalists in an interview Monday that all sections of Swazi society were pulling together in one direction to ensure the success of what was surely an event of mammoth proportions for a small kingdom like Swaziland and put it on the world map.

Despite the largely rural agrarian community afflicted with poverty, no thanks to several years of chronic drought, he said the people were supporting the dialogue as evidenced by what happened last week when a 10-year old boy pledged five chickens to help support the dialogue while most people have pledged cattle.

As for enhancing links with neighbours, he said the smart partnership dialogue provided a vital opportunity for African countries, which might otherwise would not be able to sit together and talk on the same table due to years of animosity, a characteristic of African politics.

From a regional perspective, the smart partnership championed by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad since the first Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1995, allows the sharing of ideas peacefully and achieve a win-win situation despite the destability in numerous African countries.

"In some of the troubled countries, it is an enabling tool to achieve peace," said Prince Quduza.

For instance, dialogue among African countries is important to raise awareness over HIV-AIDS, which is chronic in countries like Uganda and Swaziland.

In Swaziland, which has a population of 1.2 million people, about one in four or five people were infected with the HIV-AIDS virus, said Prince Quduza.

He said the government had set up an independent office called "Nercha" to fight the AIDS crisis in Swaziland while on a regional scale, African countries had clinched a pact with various American artistes to launch a music album, whereby proceeds from the album would be used to raise the awareness to fight AIDS.

Meanwhile, two major English-based tabloids in Swaziland, "The Swazi Observer" and "Times of Swaziland", devoted a substantial part of their coverage to the smart partnership dialogue with country's monarch, King Mswati III himself, personally checking on last minute preparations.

He was quoted as saying that Swaziland was ready to host the dialogue, especially after a national dialogue had provided exposure to its people in relation to hosting a large gathering. -- BERNAMA

MR MKO SHY