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LID-MAHATHIR

LID HAS BROUGHT SOUTH COUNTRIES CLOSER TOGETHER, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Umi Hani Sharani and Rosyatimah Tukimin

KUALA LUMPUR, July 15 (Bernama) -- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says that a notable achievement of the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) which has taken a life of its own is bringing leaders of mostly developing countries closer together.

"Malaysia for example, is very well known in Africa and similarly we know African countries and their leaders much better," he said when asked to comment on the forthcoming "Global 2004 - Langkawi International Dialogue" at a corporate function Wednesday.

Dr Mahathir, the prime mover for the dialogue which began in 1995, said that the LID, participated mainly by developing nations, has chalked up some achievements and was "glad that it is still going to go on."

"Well, it (LID) has certainly brought the leaders of these countries very close together," he said.

Following successful dialogues between leaders of developing countries especially from Africa in Langkawi, the LID spawned similar editions of the dialogue in African countries.

They have been held in Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda and Swaziland.

It also led to regional dialogues in Barbados in 1996 and 1999.

The LID has also given an opportunity for African leaders to meet more regularly and talk informally to each other about common issues affecting the continent.

While Dr Mahathir has played host to all the dialogues in Langkawi, he would be an invited guest at the upcoming LID after having stepped down as Prime Minister in October last year.

In Swaziland last year, Dr Mahathir was conferred a status of Fellow Emeritus in recognition of his contribution to the Commonwealth Partnership Technology Management (CPTM).

The London-based CPTM puts together the annual dialogue both in Malaysia and Africa.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would host this year's dialogue themed "Towards a smarter globe -- Reconciling development challenges with global security through dialogue."

The last dialogue in Africa was hosted by King Mswati III of Swaziland in the capital city of Ezulwini.

Dr Mahathir also said that knowing each member well enough is already a positive outcome of the LID.

"In addition to that, we see changes taking place in Africa and we have learned from Africa about problems that they faced which we can avoid," he said.

The constant interaction between the leaders and top corporate officials led to some major companies investing in Africa such as Telekom Malaysia, Renong, YTL Corporation and Southern Bank Bhd.

Dr Mahathir said the LID might not see much of trade issues being discussed as Iraq is still on everybody's mind.

This was unlike the dialogue in Swaziland where leaders issued the Ezulwini statement to be given to the World Trade Organization (WTO) ahead of its ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, in September.

In the statement, the leaders called on the WTO to ensure fairness and justice in world trade for everyone and insisted there shouldn't be access for the products of developed countries unless there was equal access for

products of developing countries.

"Well, at the moment talking about trade is not worth while because everybody is focused on Iraq," Dr Mahathir said. -- BERNAMA

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