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Be united, Mbeki urges developing countries

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - South African President Thabo Mbeki today urged developing countries to be united and speak in one voice to counter discriminations by the World Trade Organisation and World Bank.

"As developing countries, we need to be united. Today, this is sometimes not the case," he told participants at an ISIS International Affairs Forum on Implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) under the African Union at Nikko Hotel.

Mbeki is on a threeday working visit to Malaysia.

Speaking extensively on the experiences of South Africa and other African States postindependence, Mbeki said past programmes in African countries had failed because they were not African programmes, designed for African needs.

"The World Bank would come to us and say: `This is what is wrong with your country, this is what you should do, this is the money you will be given. Because you are poor you have no choice but to accept it'."

Mbeki said it was the time for the people of Africa to start taking responsibility for their own destiny.

He said Africa had much to learn from the concept of smart partnership constantly espoused by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said it was important for all African states to work together to ensure development.

"We need to form smart partnerships among the African people to address the challenges that come our way."

He also said Asean should collaborate with Africa.

On developments in Africa, Mbeki said it was working to develop its agricultural sector to meet the country's needs.

"Infrastructure needs to be improved in all areas such as roads, water, transportation, electricity and telecommunication. This is a prerequisite to facilitate development."

He said human resources, especially in terms of producing sufficient skilled workers and retaining them in Africa, was another issue that must be addressed in the country.

On health, Mbeki said Africa was looking at creating a health map to identify interventions for illnesses like malaria, which was one of the major causes of death in the continent.

At a media briefing later, Mbeki said he expected his visit here to strengthen bilateral ties in economic, scientific, technical and cultural co-operation as well as issues pertaining to the World Trade Organisation, United Nations and the international challenges faced in the world today.

On the coming transition of leadership from Dr Mahathir to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Mbeki said there would certainly be continuity in the relationship.