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Dr M: Langkawi dialogue must continue

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said next year's Langkawi International Dialogue should be held although he will no longer be the Prime Minister.

"It should be on. It's not for me ...it is for Malaysia," he told Malaysian journalists on his arrival at Matsapha International airport yesterday to attend the Global 2003 Southern Africa International Dialogue.

The Prime Minister said the presence of many heads of government reflected its importance and significance to the participating countries.

"Leaders from the West Indies, Thailand and China are also attending the dialogue and this shows that it is attracting much interest.

"We believe that the exchange of information and views at the dialogue will help us (the leaders) to develop our countries," said Dr Mahathir, who will receive the Smart Partnership flag on Saturday to symbolise the dialogue will be held in Langkawi next year.

Dr Mahathir will also give a speech to welcome the participants to Langkawi.

Earlier, the Prime Minister and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were given a traditional welcome by more than 100 dancers in traditional costumes.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah, who arrived from Algiers, were welcomed by the Prime Minister of Swaziland Dr Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini and Economic Planning and Development Minister Prince Guduza.

Malaysia's High Commissioner to South Africa Datuk Zainal Azman Zainal Abidin was also present.

The Prime Minister later joined other leaders at the dialogue's welcome session, which was convened by King Mswati III.

Meanwhile, former Commonwealth secretary-general Sir Sridath Ramphal yesterday paid tribute to Dr Mahathir, describing him as the "hero of the developing world".

Speaking at one of the briefings on the dialogue, Ramphal said the Prime Minister had spoken with passion and credibility about the views of the developing countries.

"He knows first hand the experience of globalisation and he has knowledge and insight of issues," said Ramphal.

Other leaders are also expected to pay tribute to Dr Mahathir, who is attending the dialogue for the last time as Prime Minister.

He was instrumental in organising the smart partnership dialogue, which was first held in Langkawi in 1995.

The leaders are expected to give Dr Mahathir a farewell gift on Saturday night, the last day of the dialogue.

A book containing selected speeches by Dr Mahathir on globalisation, smart partnership and Government, which he delivered from 1994 to 2002, is being distributed by the organisers to participants.

A book on Dr Mahathir's contribution to Africa is also expected to be launched here.

Several prominent participants spoke at a Press conference yesterday of the success of the dialogue over the years.

Swaziland Minister of Enterprise and Employment Lutfo Dlamini said the whole dialogue went beyond the normal tripartite event.

He said the participation of the Government, private sector and labour was essential to the countries.

"We need to set up a national hub to make the dialogue a regular feature," he added.

Dlamini also spoke of the foreign Press' treatment of developing countries. "I was staying at a hotel in London and when I opened the window, I saw a mass protest on the streets on May Day.

"I was angry that a BBC reporter had the courage to call me and ask for an interview on complaints against workers in Swaziland when that BBC reporter didn't even bother to report about the protests on the streets of London," he said.

Charles Minard of the Dominican Republic said the dialogue was good, but the bad would come when the countries and participants stop talking.

"What is important is to fan this dialogue process. If we fail to defend this process, we will be heading for trouble," he said, adding that the dialogue had shown tangible results although they were not immediate.