

Dr M declines comment on KJ's call to do away with LID
Malaysiakini.com
June 19, 2011

Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) founder Dr Mahathir Mohamad is unperturbed by Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin Abu Bakar's statement that such dialogues should be done away with.

People always have different opinions. They are entitled to their opinions. Other people are entitled to their opinions," he told Bernama today.

The former prime minister was asked to comment on the statement which appeared on Khairy's Twitter last night.

The statement was as follows: "(Zimbabwe President) Robert Mugabe arrived in Malaysia. What do we gain by inviting a leader like this? It has been sometime...need to halt such dialogue."

Mahathir was met after the official opening of the LID 2011 by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre in Putrajaya.

The biennial convention aims to stimulate economic collaboration between Malaysia and a continent beset by conflicts, coups and political turmoil.

The 87-year-old Mugabe (left), who is banned from travelling to the European Union over his regime's human rights record, arrived in Malaysia on Saturday and will be among leaders from 20 countries expected to attend the four-day event in the administrative capital.

Around 500 delegates from countries including Lesotho, Gambia, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Namibia were welcomed by Najib Razak when he kicked off proceedings at the 14th forum, the ninth to be held in Malaysia.

Africa is a good bet for growth, say analysts, with the International Monetary Fund expecting it to expand faster than the global average in the coming years, with six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies coming from the continent last year.

Malaysia's heavily trade-dependent economy needs to find new markets for the manufactured products, oil and palm oil that it exports.

Deputy foreign minister Kohilan Pillay said total trade between Malaysia and Africa in 2010 stood at 25 billion ringgit (\$8.2 billion), a 39 percent surge from the previous year.

"There are tremendous opportunities for Malaysia. We need to explore the various opportunities," AFP reported him as saying.

Officials say investors will meet potential partners and identify opportunities during the forum while leaders will map ways to promote trade and economic ties.

However, the invitation to controversial African leaders with poor human rights records have caused concern among activists with Sudan's Omar al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court, pulling out amid opposition to his presence from rights groups.

Former president of the Malaysian Bar Council Ragnath Kesavan (above) urged authorities to uninvite Mugabe as it will be seen as condoning his abuses.

"We should not engage with Mugabe. We should not add legitimacy to this international pariah," he said.

"It will be seen as condoning and sympathetic to what Mugabe is doing in his country," Ragnath added.

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