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PM: Find ways to tackle poverty

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LANGKAWI: Enough talk, let's find real solutions to poverty in the world.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said immediate action must be taken to resolve the problem of the poor.

"Let us, therefore, in the next two days, concentrate on finding solutions to this problem," he told some 400 participants at the opening of the Eighth Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) 2007 here last night.

At the Seventh LID in 2004, the prime minister said he had spoken on the linkage between security and the prevalence of poverty.

"Having taken that linkage into account, I consider it appropriate that we expand the discussion this time, and deliberate on how we can, and should, effectively harness human capital development and capacity building as the way forward for reducing, and ultimately eradicating, poverty in our respective countries."

Abdullah explained that one of the aims of this LID was to restart and re-energise the debate on poverty by reframing it in terms of what states could and should do at the practical level.

"I honestly believe that we can handle this task because we all have the vital resource for doing the job. We have our human capital.

"If there is any deficiency, it is because the state has inadequate capacities and the people have insufficient skills. Let us, therefore, address these twin problems and come out with some answers."

The prime minister said governments must do the necessary, not

only for social and economic development, but also for the ultimate aim of eradicating poverty.

Abdullah proposed:

- Facilitation of income-generation programmes for the poor, enabling them to have better access and make better use of various resources including land, labour, physical capital, infrastructure and technology;

- Innovative micro-credit financing schemes, such as the successful Bangladeshi model of Grameen Bank, which could assist small-scale or homestead entrepreneurs in starting or expanding their businesses. This would help small entrepreneurs gain a foothold in the mainstream economy and lift themselves out of poverty;

- Development of small- and medium-scale industries which would generate economic activity, provide employment and assist in breaking the shackles of poverty, and the channelling of foreign direct investments towards activities engaged in poverty eradication;

- The strengthening of specific technical and administrative capacities of individual organisations through technical co-operation or other exchanges in training, fellowships, expert services and supply of equipment; and

- Special attention to the empowerment of youth and women as much of their talent and potential had suffered neglect in many parts of the developing world.

"Localising ownership over policies, plans and programmes would increase the potential for success. People need to be able to feel that they are directly involved in charting the future of their country."

Abdullah reminded participants

that there must be agreement on what needed to be done even if there were no final answers on the best way of doing it.

The LID 2007 action plan, "The Way Forward", will be printed as a conference document to serve as a guide for reducing, and ultimately eradicating, poverty in the developing world.

The prime minister called on participants of LID 2007, mostly southern and eastern African developing nations, as well as regional neighbours such as Thailand and Bangladesh, to develop quality human capital which had an outlook and frame of mind committed to achieving and maintaining excellence.

In Malaysia, he said, the goal of a first class mentality was being nurtured "through a holistic approach that emphasises the development of knowledge, skills and intellectual capital in fields such as science, technology and entrepreneurship".

"To enable us to do all these, we need the foundational support of an effective national education system that is capable of maintaining high educational standards at all levels of learning and teaching. Quality education is a crucial ingredient for the development of quality human capital," he said.

"I have cited Malaysia's experience in order to illustrate the point that poverty reduction, and its eventual eradication, is not impossible anywhere.

"I need to emphasise, however, that this is a task which must be shared by all stakeholders in the society if success is to be ensured.

"These include the government, the private sector, academia and civil society, among others."