

PM's kind gesture pleases all

LANGKAWI: If there is one thing pleasing to the leaders and delegates attending the Langkawi International Dialogue (LID), it is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's magnanimous disposition.

Yesterday, despite being invited by Swaziland's King Mswati III to speak, Abdullah yielded the opportunity to allow his predecessor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad - given his vast knowledge on poverty - to propound his ideas.

The gracious gesture caught most of the delegates by surprise as Mahathir had been highly critical of certain government policies, criticisms which sometimes bordered on the personal.

Abdullah's graciousness was evident from Day One at the opening of the LID on Sunday when he asked the audience to join him in congratulating Mahathir and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, on their 51st wedding anniversary that day.

In what was surely a pleasant surprise for Mahathir and Siti Hasmah that night, there was loud applause from the audience, including 10 heads of state and government, with Mahathir later telling newsmen he was glad and appreciated Abdullah's felicitations.

The prime minister also told the 500-strong audience the couple had contributed immensely not only to the nation, but also to the LID community.

Both Mahathir and Siti Hasmah were keenly involved in networking and interactive sessions at the LID.

Given the opportunity to speak by Abdullah, Mahathir wasted no time in hitting out at the West, this time for not compensating poor countries for the brain drain to rich countries.

Describing the "best brains" of poor countries as their intellectual property right, he said "they (the rich countries) rob us, but don't pay us", inferring that poor countries are forced to pay a hefty premium for medicine that could well have been researched by people originally from poor countries but with patents held by the West.

Abdullah also held bilateral talks with Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, Lesotho's Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosilili, Sudan's President General Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir and Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe.

He was scheduled to meet the Prime Minister of St Vincent and Grenadines, Dr Ralph Gonsalves, and Zambia's President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa.

The prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, caught journalists by surprise when she visited the LID 2007 International Media Centre (IMC), managed by Bernama.

She commended the IMC for operating like a well-oiled machine to disseminate news and information on time. - Bernama