

## **Mahathir leaves his mark at Africa Conference**

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**From Muin Abdul Majid**

DAKAR, Jan 18 (Bernama) – Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad may have spent only a few hours at the conference on Africa here on Thursday but, within that timeframe, he imparted gems of knowledge and insight on governance and development that may prove useful for African nations.

The Malaysian prime minister peppered his interventions at the Third International Conference on the Emergence of Africa (ICEA-III) with tips on how to go about developing a country, drawing examples from Malaysia's own experience.

"One thing about developing a country is that you need to study the development of other countries. In the case of Malaysia, we have the 'Look East' Policy, learning from Japan, South Korea as well as China. We used to learn from Europe too.

"It's important to find a suitable model that can be emulated to expedite the development process," was the advice that he had for African nations, sharing this with Malaysian journalists as he wrapped up his Jan 16-17 visit to Senegal for the conference before flying off to London.

Dr Mahathir, 93, had the distinction of being the only Asian head of government invited to take part in the Jan 17-19 conference focusing on the central theme of 'Emergence, Private Sector and Inclusiveness'.

At the Dakar gathering, Dr Mahathir took part in the high-level panel discussion which also included Senegalese President Macky Sall and President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali, as well as the segment on the private sector as an engine of emergence.

Among the points raised by the prime minister was the importance of a stable government for development to take place, noting that political instability would hinder the process.

He also stressed the need for close cooperation between the government and the private sector, saying that such partnership had allowed the whole of Malaysia to develop very fast.

"It's not wrong for the government to work with the private sector, helping the private sector to succeed so that they may make a lot of profit, a lot of money because a portion of that will go back to the government," he argued against detractors of the concept.

At the opening session of the conference, a video message featuring Dr Mahathir was played in which he said the most important thing in trying to change the economy of a country was stability and good governance.

Immediately after his arrival in Dakar two days ago, Dr Mahathir headed to the Presidential Palace for talks with President Sall which focused on ways to forge closer ties between Kuala Lumpur and Dakar.

"We need to have closer relations not only with Senegal but also other African nations as it appears that we have not given that much attention to Africa for the past 15 years (under previous administrations)," he said at the press conference with Malaysian media.

Dr Mahathir was Malaysia's prime minister for 22 years before stepping down in 2003. He again took the helm after his Pakatan Harapan coalition won the general election in May last year.

Africa, he said, had advanced so much with countries like China and Turkey becoming important trade and investment partners.

"It goes to show that Africa has so much potential. But we need to find out what Africa needs, what products we can import from Africa and our goods that can be marketed here,"

Dr Mahathir said.

Stating that he would like to see more Malaysian companies coming to Africa and elsewhere, the prime minister said: "This is because we're supposed to be a trading nation, a trading nation needs markets. If you don't know your market, you cannot sell anything.

"So, it's important that our people and our diplomatic representatives identify areas for cooperation and trade between Malaysia and the countries concerned."

Pointing out that many African leaders whom he was familiar with were no longer around or were no longer in power, Dr Mahathir said the newer African leaders appeared to know about Malaysia, viewing it as a model country from which good lessons can be had.

The prime minister, however, said this would not include the Malaysia of the past 15 years.

"If you use that model, you know what will happen," he said in an apparent reference to the woe-laden period in the country's timeline.

On another matter, he said that initiatives such as the South-South Cooperation and the Langkawi Dialogue could be given a new lease of life. But for now, he said, the government's focus was on improving the situation in the country.

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