

Be adventurous, Mahathir tells local businessmen

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today criticised Malaysian businessmen for their timidity and unwillingness to "venture into anything unless they are protected".

He said this made the businessmen "stay at home" for only their own Government would afford them protection.

"Abroad, they can expect none and consequently they will not venture forth to face open competition," said the Prime Minister at the Malaysian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry dinner.

What was needed, he said, was for Malaysians to be more adventurous. Malaysian businessmen should team up and go into large-scale production so that they could be more competitive in

the world market.

"Until they learn to do this, they are never ever going to get out of the import-substitute industries," he said.

He said at present, "we produce on a small scale for the local market and export only the surplus".

On the other hand, newly-industrialised countries like South Korea and Taiwan designed their plants on a scale that lower their unit cost and were capable of selling at low prices abroad, he added.

He said if the pioneers of the rubber industry had been timid Malaysians, the country would not be selling even a kilo of rubber overseas.

"Thank God they weren't. I am not usually thankful to the British, but this is one instance when I think they deserve to be thanked."

"A lot too can be done in the areas that tradi-

tionally had been left to our neighbours, for example marketing and the so-called invisibles," he said.

He said the reduced government spending would have a certain dampening effect on the economy. Mida reported that in the first six months of this year, there were 228 proposals as compared to 310 for the same period last year.

However, he noted that it was heartening that investments were still coming.

He said the fact that Malaysia continued to receive new investment proposals — about 40 a month — was a clear indication that there was confidence in the future of the country.

He urged Malaysian manufacturers to be more quality-conscious.

He said there had also been a few instances

where foreign traders had been cheated by the unscrupulous in this country.

"Often, it is difficult for any legal action to be taken because these people are quite smart.

"The Government can oversee and even take action but that can only be done after the damage is done. The better way is to prevent such occurrences," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir suggested that exporters form associations which would certify bona fide traders in a move to reassure foreign importers and reduce the chances of the unscrupulous cheating people who have only just begun to do business with Malaysia.

"Nothing is more damaging to the nation's economy than a bad reputation," he said.