

Strive to put economy right again, PM tells managers

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned last night of a danger that managers of the world may despair at the current recession and resign themselves to the collapse of the system.

"Should the managers surrender, catastrophe will follow," he said.

"It is unthinkable that the market economy the managers have built up, that has contributed so much towards human prosperity, can so deteriorate that the managers cannot put it right again."

Dr Mahathir made these remarks when he opened the 20th World Management Congress organised by the World Council of Management at Shangri-la Hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

He described the present global economic situation as undergoing a period of "unprecedented recession."

He said expectations has been that the recession had "bottomed out" and that recovery is "just around the corner."

"There is recovery but it is shallow and transient. The subsequent bout of economic depression has hit a new low.

"There is a danger that the managers among us may despair and resign themselves to what seems to be inevitable, the collapse of the system."

At the same time, Dr Mahathir called for a greater need to be positive, to look for opportunities and to advantageously manage these opportunities.

Despite the prevailing bad times, he said, managers should not be over-pessimistic, give in passively, seek excuses or hurl accusations.

He said there were many instances where managers had risen to the occasion and had profited.

The business environment is now increasingly characterised by intense domestic and global competition, economic uncertainty, accelerated technological breakthrough, constantly shifting markets, changes in consumer behaviour and alternating calls for liberal trade and protection.

"Our own diligence and efforts can easily be frustrated or negated by the selfish counter-actions and policies of others.

"The only thing that is certain is uncertainty. It is under uncertain conditions that the best qualities of managers are tried and tested," he said.

Dr Mahathir said "*Managing for Excellence*" — the topic for this Congress — is within the reach of any organisation, country or people.

Managers, he said, must have an inquiring mind, an eye for opportunity, and total commitment to managing with maximum benefit.

He said the world had gone into recession before and had recovered. The present recession must be managed at all levels so that recovery will come soon.

Malaysia is fully committed to the pursuit of excellence and had critically examined, in the last five years, all things that had been taken for granted.

"We have questioned old policies and approaches. We have even assaulted many administrative and management methods that have been considered sacred. At least the government has," he said.

He added this assault on the traditional and the familiar had met more than the usual quota of criticism and resentment.

The Malaysia Incorporated concept where it helped the private sector

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PM says managers must continue struggle

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to make profits was alien to the concept of government as the regulator and enforcer.

Dr Mahathir said privatizing whole government departments ran contrary to the age-old trend of the government expanding its role.

He said awarding turn-key projects to foreign contractors caused an uproar but it had also forced locals to adopt and adapt to new methods, to be conscious of quality and quality control circles, and other aspects of excellence in management.

The pursuit of excellence, he added, required efforts, energy, time and sacrifices. It took tremendous investment in energy, time and resources to create and build the foundations of excellence.

In striving for excellence, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia had to constantly face, ride and win over the voices of cynicism, apathy, dissent, resistance and short-term orientation.

"In short, the commitment to excellence must be a national agenda, national consensus, a collective commitment to a common purpose.

"There is no short cut on the road to excellence." — NST