

Dr M: Need for Asians to be receptive to progress

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THERE is a need for Asians to change their attitude and be more receptive in bringing about progress, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said last night.

Although many basic technologies and discoveries originated in Asia, these remained underdeveloped and inefficiently exploited, he said at the fifth congress of the Federation of Asian Veterinary Associations in Kuala Lumpur.

"For example, the Chinese some 2,500 years ago used antibiotics without knowing it when they applied mouldy soya bean curd to boils and carbuncles and obtained beneficial results. However, they never found out why mouldy soya bean curd had curative effects on infections.

"On the other hand, Western scientists observed similar effects and their study of the phenomenon led to the discovery of penicillin in 1928," he said.

The Prime Minister also pointed out that Asia, despite its earlier civilisation and headstart in agriculture, now lags far behind in terms of food productivity.

He also said while the people of developed Western nations worried about the balance between red and white meat and about cholesterol intake, many of the Asians suffered chronic malnutrition and protein deficiency.

This, he added, is ironic as the art of grain cultivation and animal husbandry originated in Asia.

While innumerable factors can be attributed to the anomaly, one thing is undeniable — there is nothing inherently "anti-

progress" in the Asian cultural heritage, he said.

The Prime Minister also quoted examples where rapid and vast changes have taken place in Asia, saying countries like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have made enviable progress in areas quite remote from their cultural heritage.

However, Asian farmers will not be able to readily adopt new technology as long as they use subsistence-type farming as a way of life, he said.

This, he said, can be seen in the case of the development of the poultry and swine industry in Malaysia, where no meaningful development was noted in the 1950s until farmers switched from backyard farming to commercial ventures.

In this, the Government has developed a strategy to upgrade selected subsistence farmers in animal husbandry and organise them into small commercial units, he added.

He said organising farmers into commercial units and grouping them will also facilitate a more organised marketing system, more cost-effective delivery of services and better control of quality.

"Sophisticated modern technology can only yield benefits when applied on a large scale in commercial enterprises. As long as the country has only subsistence peasant farmers, the Government cannot apply this technology," he said.

He added that the farming community in Malaysia has to be restructured if farming is to be modernised, saying that this is what Malaysia is trying to do.