

Top civil servants told to have vision

By Nor Hawa Yunus

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. -- Heads of Government departments and administrative officers must have vision and be action-oriented in facing future challenges, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the country would soon be entering the 21st century -- an era of intense competition in the field of international economics.

To ensure that Malaysia is not left behind, the country must ensure its economic strength.

In this respect, Dr Mahathir said, efficiency in management in the public sector was paramount, noting that efficient management by civil servants would help stimulate economic growth.

Opening the 55th anniversary celebrations of the civil service here, Dr Mahathir said the "clean, efficient and trustworthy" concept would continue to be the basic values in the public sector.

"To face the challenges in this competitive era, heads of departments must have vision and the ability to formulate effective strategy. We must understand the factors and pressures from within and outside the country, as well as their relationship."

Dr Mahathir said administrative officers must also be action-oriented.

He called for efforts to modernise the public sector, saying that the old work system must be reviewed and tidied up.

The counter services as well as physical appearance and cleanliness of offices must be improved to portray a good image.

The Prime Minister said the success and performance of the civil service were no longer based on the quantitative criteria, such as the amount of allocation or number

of programmes, but rather on its success in implementing projects.

On the Government's privatisation policy, Dr Mahathir said this must be made a success as soon as possible because every sector of the population would benefit from it.

He said through privatisation, the Government would not only be reducing its expenditure but increasing its income from the taxes imposed on the profits of the private companies that took over the services from the Government.

Dr Mahathir said although the Government formulated the policy early, privatisation was a trend that was beginning to be more accepted the world over, noting that even the communists were acknowledging that State ownership of all services would not help develop the economy or contribute to equitable distribution of wealth.

"Therefore, the communists are now introducing *perestroika*, that is a restructuring of their political and economic system."

Dr Mahathir said the achievements of the Port Klang Container Service, Malaysia Airlines, Malaysian International Shipping Corporation and Syarikat Telekom Malaysia had underlined the success of the privatisation policy.

He noted that the workers did not lose out but received better income. At the same time, the services rendered had improved and the Government's revenue through tax on the privatised services would increase.

Dr Mahathir said that with lower expenditure and more revenue, the Government would be in a better position to increase salaries of civil servants as well as meet other costs.

He said it was the Government's intention

to see that both public and private sector workers received better salaries, noting that an increase in income and productivity would not result in the increase of prices of goods or services.

A higher income would provide for better purchasing power, which would step up buying and selling activities, leading to rapid economic growth.

However, if demands for salary increases were made without any corresponding increase in productivity, the country would not become competitive and the market for its goods would decline.

"What will make us non-competitive is when salaries are raised without any increase in productivity. In the end, workers will suffer because an economic slowdown will result in reduced salaries and more unemployment," he said.

On the Malaysia Incorporated concept, Dr Mahathir said certain Government administrators, particularly in the middle level, still did not seem to have a clear understanding of it.

He said the policy would not fully achieve its desired objectives if the private sector continued to face difficulties when dealing with Government departments.

He said the thrust of the concept was close co-operation between the public and private sectors, whereby the private sector develops the country's trade and commerce while the public sector outlines the main policies and provides positive support services.

Dr Mahathir later launched the memoirs of a former director of the Public Services Department, Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Zakaria, and visited the exhibition on the history of the civil service.