

Be more innovative in business style, Malaysians urged

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has told Malaysians to discard their conservative attitude and move towards greater innovation in business approaches.

He said attitudinal changes would result in improved efficiency.

The country and the people would never progress if everything was stagnant and remained conservative.

Interviewed over a special programme over RTM tonight — *Conversation with the Prime Minister* — Dr Mahathir said the Government had placed significant stress on innovation and other related developments.

"But while it is possible to innovate, attitudes have got to change ... among our researchers and engineers. There must be greater willingness to innovate and not to follow, to do the things only the way it has always been done.

"You know there are any number of ways of doing things. So if attitudes change we can innovate and become more efficient," Dr Mahathir said as he responded to a wide range of questions from the panelists.

The panelists were Dr Noordin Sopiee, the Director-General of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies; Tan Sri R. Navaratnam, the chief executive officer of Bank Beruh (M) Bhd; and Datuk Dr Kamal Salih, the execu-

tive director of the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research.

Dr Mahathir was asked a variety of questions ranging from the state of the economy, the education system vis-a-vis national economic needs, the elements in privatisation and Malaysia Incorporated and his vision for a successful Malaysia.

He spoke of the need to improve management techniques, especially in the light of the country's desire to improve technology. Stressing the importance of management, Dr Mahathir said one could buy technology and raise capital, but warned that failure to manage would make one's venture fail.

"There is a huge market in this country itself but it is not fully exploited because people do not see opportunities, and if they see opportunities, they don't manage them well.

"Two businesses in the same field — one can fail, another can succeed and succeed very well. It is entirely due to management. For example, in the restaurant business, Malaysian food is definitely (better) than European food, at least to our palate.

"Yet we see a proliferation of *Kentucky Fried Chicken*, *McDonalds* and hamburger (stands) — food which is strange to us — doing extremely well, selling by the millions. Yet Malaysian food is not franchised because we don't understand franchise and

marketing management," he said.

A panelist then asked the Prime Minister to elaborate on Government plans for human resource development.

To prepare for the future the Prime Minister felt that graduates who had just finished their studies should spend a lot of time learning the ropes and not expect to take on top jobs.

In Japan, he said, graduates coming out from universities began on the assembly line before becoming executives.

He said this was good philosophy because it helped develop good work ethics.

"But here, because of the demands and expectations of these people, it has been very difficult to persuade them they should begin from the bottom," he said.

He added that more emphasis had been given to vocational subjects than pure academic stuff like history and geography.

"That is why we have introduced subjects like living skills in schools because we have to live in a more industrialised environment.

There are certain skills which are needed, for example the understanding of mechanical and electronic things, trading and transactions.

"We are going to stress management, we are going to stress technical subjects that are more relevant to an industrialised, rather than agrarian, society."