

Maintain good image, PM tells engineers

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — It is extremely important that engineers, like other professionals, maintain a good image and accountability, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said technical aspects of any project had direct bearing on costs but did not lend themselves to critical assessment by non-engineers.

"It will, therefore, be easy for specifications to be tailored for a definite objective. Engineers must avoid this temptation if they wish to keep their reputation and that of their profession in high esteem.

"In the long run, the profession and the engineers will gain more by sticking to professional ethics and integrity," he said at the 20th anniversary dinner of the Malaysian Engineers Board tonight.

Malaysia was fortunate to be blessed with abundant natural resources, good administration and responsible citizens who valued political stability and racial harmony.

"We have achieved considerable progress — a unique achievement considering the complexity of our society and its inequities. We can do more if everyone understands that what is good for society and the nation is also good for the individual.

"It is far better to seek

common good than short-term personal gains at the expense of society. Engineers constitute an important cog in the wheels of progress.

"The greater the integrity of engineers, the smoother will the wheels of progress turn."

Dr Mahathir said with the emphasis on industrialisation in pursuit of Malaysia's Vision 2020, the demand for engineers and technologists in the near future would definitely increase.

By the year 2000, some 56,000 engineers are needed compared with 26,500 in 1990, a rise of 9.8 per cent per annum.

He said: "It is crucial that we get the right kind of engineers to meet the needs of our industry. Universities and other institutions must provide continuing education and re-training to fulfil this purpose.

"They must modernise science and engineering education consistent with changing times. It may be necessary to reverse the sequence of teaching so that practical hands-on work comes before the theories and principles of engineering.

"Most students learn faster if they are physically well acquainted with their subject."

The role of engineers, Dr Mahathir said, had to be seen in the broad spectrum

of supplying vital technological input in the business of wealth generation.

Instead of seeing engineering as an exact science divorced from the realities of commerce, engineers needed to appreciate that engineering without application was unproductive.

"Engineers have to assume their place as both generalists and specialists, knowledgeable about the multi-disciplinary environments of today. Only if engineers have achieved sufficient all-round experience, can they prove useful in the processes of commercialising engineering-based enterprises."

In this new Information Age, to remain competitive, one must make the quantum leap into strategic technologies, such as micro-electronics, Dr Mahathir said.

Investments in electronics were already highly visible in Malaysia. However, exciting opportunities were created by new innovations in areas like electronics-based communications which could lead to shorter product life cycles by using concepts such as "concurrent engineering", he said.

"The future growth and survival of companies will hinge upon the ability of engineers to use these applications in the right places, and in continuous innovation through collaborative research."