

PM: M'sia a leader in high tech goods

By A. LETCHUMANAN

KUANTAN: Malaysia has emerged as the leader among developing nations in the region in the export of high technology goods, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"This proves our success in attracting high technology industries," the Prime Minister said at the opening of two plants producing industrial chemicals at the Gebeng Industrial Zone.

They are the methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE)/Propylene and Polypropylene plants owned by MTBE Malaysia, a joint venture by Petronas, Neste Oy from Finland and Idemitsu Petrochemical of Japan.

Dr Mahathir said the country's capability in using high technology helped change its export structure from one of merely exporting raw ma-

terials to that of valued-added goods within 10 years.

MTBE is used as an octane booster in the production of unleaded petrol while propylene is used as a raw material for the manufacture of a wide range of plastic products.

Dr Mahathir said although the country was on the correct path in terms of policy, management and administration, efforts should be doubled to attract new technologies for it to be more competitive.

He said the petrochemical industry was still in its early stage even though there was a reserve of 76.7 trillion cu ft of natural gas.

"In our efforts to become a developed nation, we must also take into consideration the need to protect the environment," Dr Mahathir said.

The rapid industrial de-

velopment and urbanisation has put pressure on the environment, he added.

He said that in the early 1950s and 1960s, there was less smoke released into the air because there were only 670,000 vehicles on the road.

"But the number has increased to 5.5 million vehicles in 1990," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the Government had taken action through the enforcement of laws in July 1985 to reduce the lead content in petrol.

"The setting up of the MTBE plants is timely and complements the Government's efforts to reduce air pollution," he said, adding that a few countries have recognised MTBE's positive contribution as an "oxygenate."

Dr Mahathir said the United States had intro-

duced a "Clean Air Act" which required a minimum "oxygenate" usage in the unleaded petrol.

"Thailand has also introduced MTBE usage in the gasoline content while Singapore has introduced a special tax incentive to refineries which produce unleaded petrol," he said.

He said Malaysia had also taken similar proactive steps with the price of unleaded petrol being reduced by three sen from next year to encourage the usage of environment-friendly fuel.

"The 35 per cent import duty and 10 per cent sales tax on catalytic converters will be abolished to encourage the usage of equipment," he said.

He hoped that the quality of air on major roads, especially in towns, would improve when more vehicles use unleaded petrol and natural gas.