

PM: It's clear Malaysia can acquire

# We have the

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KUANTAN, Thurs. — It is increasingly clear that Malaysia leads the other developing countries in the region in the export of high technology products, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"This is a clear indication of Malaysia's capability to acquire and command new technologies," he said.

Opening the Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE) and Propylene and Polypropylene complex in Gebeng, about 20km from here, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would continue with its efforts to acquire and command selected technologies to allow the country to become more competitive.

In this respect, he said, the private sector would continue to act as the engine of growth and to help bring the country to a greater level of industrialisation.

Dr Mahathir said the efforts by Petronas and its partners in the MTBE/propylene and polypropylene project would hasten the process to make Malaysia an efficient, dynamic and high-tech developed nation.

"I believe the country appreciates the prudence and commercial viability of the petrochemical projects which Petronas ventures into," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the petrochemical industry in Malaysia was still in the early stage.

"With huge reserves amounting to about 76.7 trillion standard cubic ft and its broad range of applications, natural gas will become a most suitable feedstock to produce petrochemical products," he said.

With the operation of the polypropylene plant, Dr Mahathir said he was confident that Petronas would be able to play an important role as a full-fledged producer of monomers and polymers, basic raw material for the plastic industry.

Dr Mahathir said the usage of plastic per capita in Malaysia was still low compared with the developed nations.

"With the expected completion of the ethylene and

polyethelene plants in Keritih, Terengganu in the middle of 1995, I believe that the plastic industry in Malaysia will move into a new phase," he said.

He said with a guaranteed supply of raw materials, Malaysia was expected to maintain its competitiveness by producing plastic base products.

"In addition, manufacturers and fabricators will have the opportunity to diversify from just producing spare parts to more value added products," he added.

Dr Mahathir said in the efforts to make Malaysia an industrialised nation, there was a need to give attention to protection of the environment.

In the 1950s and 1960s when the number of vehicles on the roads was low, smoke emission did not affect the environment too much.

But today, Dr Mahathir said, there were more than 5.5 million vehicles in Malaysia and the number was increasing every year.

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Smoke from the leaded fuel of vehicles was fast affecting the environment.

The situation was worsened by the growing number of industries with toxic wastes whose system of disposing them, if not properly treated or done, could have a negative effect on the environment.

Dr Mahathir said efforts must be made to balance development with the need to protect the environment.

He said the setting up of the MTBE plant was appropriate and timely as it would produce a product that would replace lead in petrol as the octane booster.

Many countries had recognised the positive contribution of MTBE as oxygenate. The United States, for example, had introduced the Clear Air Act which provided a minimum use of oxygenate in unleaded petrol.

Dr Mahathir said Singapore had introduced tax incentives to refineries which blend the unleaded petrol. "Malaysia is expected to follow suit," he added.

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