

Roll with the punches, Mahathir tells M'sians

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia must keep up its fighting form to sustain growth to realise Vision 2020 objectives, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the country must consistently improve its competitiveness and warned against possible complacency as it became more successful.

He added the nation must improve its ability "to roll with the punches, to take the economic thump on the chin and to

bounce back in better fighting shape."

"This is not easy because success and greater affluence will corrupt us, soften us and make us flabby," he warned.

Dr Mahathir cautioned that success and greater comfort would cause Malaysians to lower their guard and increase their girth.

He was speaking at the closing of the *First International Malaysian Students' Conference on Vision 2020* organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

Dr Mahathir also stressed the need to sustain Malaysia's strong growth over the coming years.

He said if growth in the early years was not high enough while those in the later years was too low, the average of seven per cent growth will not be achieved.

Although Malaysia was

now a dynamo, it was only half-way to where the country wanted to be by 2020, he added.

"If per capita income is the criterion, we are only a quarter up the road. We need to quadruple our income," he said.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia's prospective plan called for seven per cent annual growth over the span of 30 years.

Malaysia grew by an average of 6.7 per cent in the 20 years between 1970 and 1990 and by more than eight and a half per cent in the last five years, he said.

"So you might think that an additional 0.3 per cent yearly growth is no big deal. But believe me, it is," he said.

He said for some reasons or other, economies with a big base tend to grow more slowly than those with a small base.

"Developed economies

do not grow at the rate of developing economies and so early growth must be high in order to achieve a good average," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was much to be done and accomplished in the 312 months to 2020, adding that it require the mobilisation of the entire Malaysian people.

"All have a role to play, contribution from enlightened and dedicated leaders, from leaders who share the dream at the ambition of those who preceded them," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said Vision 2020 also set out two political challenges to foster and develop a mature democratic society.

He said it would practise a form of mature consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy that could be a model for many developing countries.

"It would also include the establishment of a fully united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny, nation that is at peace with itself, territorially and ethically integrated," he said.

Later, Dr Mahathir had a closed-door dialogue with the 100 participants from local and foreign universities.

The four-day conference was aimed at involving students in the journey towards Vision 2020, and to make them aware that they had a stake in the objectives.

The students sought the Prime Minister's views on a wide-range of issues including the country's leadership, freedom of expression, corruption, race relations, the development of Bangsa Malaysia, child care and the role of non-bumiputras in achieving Vision 2020.

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