

Adapting to new work environment

By S. Jayakrishnan and Tengku Sariffuddin

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Workers and employers should invest in skill development and realise their human resource development responsibilities if they are to adapt to the new work environment, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said workers must constantly improve their skills and develop new skills, thereby preparing for the changes that technology will bring to the shop floor.

It is through higher productivity growth that workers will be able to improve their real incomes.

"Workers should seek to improve their standard of living not simply through demanding for higher wages but by improving their productivity.

"Productivity comes not only through the use of more capital, better work organisation, and proper work attitudes but more importantly by workers and employers investing in skill development."

Dr Mahathir said this at the opening of the German-Malaysian Institute (GMI) at Taman Shamelin Perkasa in Cheras today. Also present were the German Minister of Economic Co-operation and Development Carl-Dieter Spranger, and Minister of Public Enterprises Datuk Dr Yusof Nor.

The GMI, the brainchild of Dr Mahathir, is an advanced skill training centre set up as a limited company by the Malaysian and German Governments to train Malaysians as trainers and skilled technicians.

Dr Mahathir said workers too must realise their own human resource development responsibilities.

If Malaysian workers are to adapt to the new work environment, they must begin to play their part in ma-

terialising that training culture.

Even as developing countries such as Malaysia continue to emphasise the importance of cost competitiveness and the need to promote productivity through hard work and sacrifices, there are attempts by some to link trade with international labour standards.

"If these attempts succeed, income for a few may go up, but most are likely to be unemployed.

"The disparity between the rich and the poor will be enhanced."

An integral part of competence is social competency and this has to be emphasised because it touches on the Malaysian core value system.

The development of the values and attitudes of the country's manpower must become a necessary component of all training programmes.

Dr Mahathir said it was recently found in many developed industrialised countries that nearly half of the skill of technical workers had become obsolete within three to seven years of formal education and training.

"This phenomenon, which is largely due to the rapidity of technological change, has resulted in rapidly changing job content.

"It is for this reason, among others, that skill delivery institutions must institute greater collaboration with industry in order to keep pace with technological advances in industry and their corresponding manpower needs."

"The quality of the workforce is essentially the decisive element in a country's road to economic success and prosperity.

Improving the quality of the workforce is, in a nutshell, what human resource development is all about.

Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian Government placed strong emphasis on human

resources development because of its belief that the population represented its ultimate resource.

Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan, about 13 per cent of the Federal Government development budget has been allocated for education and training.

"This is a relatively high proportion of development expenditure, and compares very favourably by all international standards."

The education and training of the country's workforce involves many role players and that in addition to the Government, other key actors include employers, workers, schools, training institutions, unions and even parents.

Skill development is, however, very often perceived as the domain and responsibility of the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the GMI, as its name suggested, was born out of bilateral co-operation and that it had taken cognisance of and tried to bridge the Malaysian Government's concern for training avenues for potential Malaysian craftsmen with Germany's well-known comparative advantage in precision and production technology, vocational training and specialised instructors.

The GMI is also a hybrid between factory and school which seeks to combine theory and practice into one so that its trainees are assured of entering the world of work without the fear of job mismatch.

The GMI will be one of the main providers of highly-skilled technicians.

Although GMI's total capacity is expected to be only 450 when fully operational in 1998, the role of the GMI in creating and augmenting the supply of trained manpower at the advanced level cannot be understated.

What is desired is that with the highest standards of teaching provided, coupled with state-of-the-art

equipment, the GMI will be able to contribute towards improving the quality of the workforce.

Although the current mandate of the GMI is to produce highly-skilled technicians for industry, training institutions like the GMI should consider creating linkages with institutions of higher technical education offering degree-level education with a view to providing avenues for their graduates to enhance their education and skills.

Such linkages will also strengthen the practical and industrial exposure of the engineers who graduate from these institutions, in view of the combination of practical training at GMI and further academic education at the university level.

Dr Mahathir said the standards required for skill training were also getting higher with advances in technology and this meant that those who were accepted into vocational and technical training institutes must also be academically good.

"Skill training is no longer meant for the school dropout. We must change our bias against blue-collar jobs and vocational training if we are to successfully walk the next mile."

Speaking to reporters later Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was looking into the possibility of setting up twinning programmes in fields such as electronics to computer programming with institutions of higher learning in Germany with the co-operation of the German Government in its efforts to make the country an education centre.

He said he had discussed the matter with Spranger.

With the co-operation of the German Government and companies, the Malaysian Government would like to set up more of such centres, Dr Mahathir added.