

Dr M: Need to nurture inventive community

By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia needs to create a community which is inventive to enable the country to contribute to the world's scientific and technological wealth, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister added that such a community would also help the country to become a fully industrialised nation and enable its technology to penetrate the international market.

He called on scientists and technologists to upgrade their expertise so that local technology could be comparable with that of the developed countries.

"This is a critical factor which can give us a competitive advantage in the international arena," he said when launching the national-level "Living Skills Expo and Students' Creations" at the Technical College in Bandar Tun Razak here.

Dr Mahathir said that although the Government encouraged the transfer of

technology from foreign countries, efforts to develop the country's own technology was very important.

Malaysia had made several achievements through industrial research and development (R&D), but comparatively, the effect of technological development was not satisfactory.

"Therefore, the private sector must upgrade R&D activities and consider objectively the need to develop local technology," he added.

However, Dr Mahathir was happy that Malaysia had produced scientists who had been successful at international level, like winning a gold medal at the 22nd International Exhibition for New Inventions and Techniques in Geneva, Switzerland, in April.

Since the Government was determined to produce scientists and technologists for R&D activities at a ratio of 1,000 for every one million people by the year 2,000, science education would certainly become increasingly relevant.

This was because the level of education of Malaysia's human resources was lower compared with countries like South Korea, Japan and the United States.

There were 400 researchers to every one million people in Malaysia in 1989, compared to 6,500 researchers for every one million people in Japan, 3,000 for every one million in Germany and 1,300 to every one million people in South Korea.

Dr Mahathir said designers and inventors in the country should be aware of the fact that all inventions and innovations should be marketable not only locally, but also abroad.

"Therefore, attention to strategies must emphasise the commercialising of potential inventions so that they meet the market requirements," he added.

He also spoke of the need for scientists and technologists to give attention to "techno-entrepreneurship" as well as customer needs and effective market strategies.

Dr Mahathir called on the private sector and non-government organisations to help the Education Ministry and government agencies to instil the innovative interest among the younger generation.

The Malaysian Invention and Design Society, he said, should be more aggressive in assisting young inventors to improve themselves so that they could achieve international recognition.

In the developed countries, the private sector was only involved in establishing technical training institutes while NGOs encouraged activities which could instil innovative and inventive interests among the younger generation.

In Japan, for example, Mitsubishi had provided five technical institutes for the youths.

The Japan Institute of Invention and Innovation also encouraged scientific and technological creativity among students and helped to form design clubs in schools.

Dr Mahathir said exhibitions on design organised in Japan every year had managed to produce scientific inventions not only among students but also among teachers.

"In Malaysia, the encouragement given by Petronas through designing competitions should become an example to other private bodies," he added.

He also urged the younger generation to work towards academic excellence, especially in mathematics, science and communications to develop greater interest in this aspect.

He later gave away prizes to winners of the various sections in the competitions and visited the expo side where all the inventions were displayed.

Among those present were Education Minister Datuk Dr Sulaiman Daud, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and Education Ministry director-general Tan Sri Dr Wan Mohd Zahid Mohd Noordin.