

Take part in global

By K.P. Waran

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. --- Companies must be willing to take long-term risks and participate in global commerce and industry instead of taking the easier route through the stock exchange and property market, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysians would not be able to create a strong generation of entrepreneurs in international trade and industry in the future if they did not take such risks.

"Entrepreneurs should take note that the relative smallness does not prevent individuals and corporations from competing effectively in the world market.

"Strength can be developed based on lower operating costs, mobility, market diversity and segmentation, speciality and quality products, and most importantly, establishing alliances," he said when open-

ing the 43rd congress of the World Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

Over 400 delegates from 30 countries, including the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, France, Australia, Britain, Taiwan, India, South Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia are attending the five-day congress organised by Peniagawati (Women Bumiputeras in Business and Professions Association). (Please see reports on Page 29.)

He said Malaysia had been successful in attracting direct foreign investments but added that the ability to invest overseas was a strong reflection of the level of progress of a country.

In this context, he said local entrepreneurs, should expect no immediate gain for the country as a result of investment by Malaysians in foreign countries but added that there will eventually be substantial returns.

Calling on entrepreneurs to develop a more global approach so that their access to the global market was ensured, he pointed out that in this era of globalisation and rapid social and economic changes, no country could achieve economic well-being by closing its borders and restricting the flow of goods, capital, technology and people.

Dr Mahathir, however, expressed confidence that with the high entrepreneurial spirit, good work ethics, perseverance and extensive networking, entrepreneurs in general and women entrepreneurs in particular, would be able to venture and establish themselves successfully overseas.

He urged them to identify their products and countries in which they were interested and start to form smart partnerships.

He said Malaysian entrepreneurs were now a lot more independent, resilient and more willing to take

calculated risks at home and abroad. They have become important players in the economic mainstream of national development and were continuously on the lookout for new business ventures.

"They have become important lynchpins in the country's current economic progress and will definitely play a major role in thrusting Malaysia confidently into the 21st century."

He said women entrepreneurs had not been forgotten in the formulation of government policies. The facilities and opportunities were available to them as much as they were to their male counterparts, he stressed.

He said the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development was working together with major private corporations and non-governmental organisations to create new start-up opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

He said the opportunities

commerce, says PM

were very much related to skills and willingness to become owner-operators to ensure their business ventures grew systematically.

Dr Mahathir was confident that women entrepreneurs who were positive in their work approach, mindset and outlook would be successful in finding a suitable niche for themselves in the global market.

During a dialogue with the participants later, he was asked by a Belgian delegate what Malaysia intended to do with the advent of the "information superhighway" where unlimited information was available at the touch of a button. Dr Mahathir said Malaysia cannot "run away from it".

"I was once told that in a matter of time you may not even need a satellite dish to receive international telecasts as all you may need is just a coat hanger. We welcome all useful and relevant information reaching the masses but some people are

deliberately channelling rubbish and pornography in the Internet service.

"The Government can try to filter some of the information but more importantly we want to build value systems among the people so that they can make an evaluation and reject the 'rubbish'," he said.

To a question from a Malaysian delegate on the Government's policy on the role of women in the country, the Prime Minister said since women made up 50 per cent of the population, their services, skills and abilities were required for the country to progress and catch up with other countries.

"Apart from the contribution of their expertise, they also carry the burden of influencing and educating their children, who make up the country's future generations, to ensure they are imbued with the right values and contribute to the nation's development," he added.

Asked by the president of the World Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Joke van de Boer, to give an insight into the conceptualisation of Vision 2020, Dr Mahathir said as a doctor Vision 2020 meant "a clear vision" to chart the future of the nation and to give the people a "destination" to head for.

"I also chose the year 2020 because I will not be around then and nobody can blame me. But if future leaders do not do enough to ensure continued progress I will be there to haunt them," he said in jest and had the participants in stitches.

To a question by a Thai delegate on the introduction of a handicraft industry for rural women, such as those widely found in Chiang Mai, Dr Mahathir said, steps would be taken to do so.

He added that many Malaysian women preferred to work in airconditioned factories and as such cottage industries for women were

growing slowly unlike in Thailand and other neighbouring nations.

A South African delegate asked how Malaysia planned to overcome the problem faced by many countries where stringent quality standards are applied by importing nations such as those in the European Union in a bid to curb the entry of products from developing countries.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia insisted that all exports meet with the standards required by importing nations and steps are also taken by the industries to obtain international quality certification.

However, he added, some quarters and competitors branded products from Malaysia and other countries as unsafe in a bid to stifle the competition. This sometimes required Malaysia to offer explanations and embark on campaigns to clear the image of the products, he said.