

Dr M: Vital to develop our own science and technology

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Malaysia must develop its own science and technology to a level comparable to that of Europe, North America and Japan, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister said this was important because "unless we develop and sustain a strong technological and scientific base we cannot provide for the welfare of our people".

Stating that Malaysia had a strong commitment to the development of science and technology, he said:

"To ensure a more intensive process of building on endogenous science and technology, we must shift the majority of our school children and university undergraduates to the scientific stream so that instead of the present 25 per cent, we should have in excess of 50 per cent in the near future.

"This requires the propagation of a value system that encourages scientific scholarship with excellence," Dr Mahathir said at the inauguration of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia at the Hotel Istana here.

He said the Government allocated large sums of money for long-term scientific research under the intensified research in the priority areas (IRPA) programme for the past few development plans.

"To be effective and to ensure sustainable growth in scientific research within the capabilities of the country, we will re-examine and

where necessary revise our strategies of allocating funds in accord with the latest trends."

However, this was not an easy task, particularly in finding the right balance between applied and basic research, he added.

He said for industries, there was a slightly more defined task to generate products and processes that sell and, as such, investment in applied research and technological innovations should, therefore, be given priority.

Long-term benefits for the nation were, however, harder to ascertain since, in addition to the economic dimension of the research, there was the nebulous cultural dimension that may be beneficial by acting as a catalyst to further scientific enquiry.

"This is particularly true for the basic research whose output may not be of commercial value today but may yield greater economic benefits in the future."

He was confident, in this respect, the academy would play a major role as a body of scientific experts in assessing research being done here and guide the country towards strategic areas of benefit.

Dr Mahathir assured the scientific community of support for any promising research, including those which ensured sustainable growth of scientific knowledge and technology which could put the nation at the cutting edge of modern sci-

ence.

He said the public should be made aware of what could happen to their lives and future generations, given that science had the power to affect human society and the world systems in a very major way.

In this respect, he noted that the scientist had the ethical responsibility to ensure that his research did not have negative effects, either in the form of potential environmental degradation, invasion of privacy or violation of human rights.

He said the development of science should always be balanced and although there might be priorities, no one science could be developed at the expense of another.

"Here the academy can help in communicating with the public through its own scientific bulletins and colloquiums."

He said science should be understood as a unity and this was particularly true today where different disciplines of science had come together for mutual support with scope for some of them to eventually giving birth to new fields and disciplines.

He was confident more and more Malaysians would develop an inquiring mind and venture into newer fields of scientific knowledge.

The Prime Minister said he based this confidence on the numerous inventions and innovations presented by Malaysians at this year's Mindex Exhibition and

hoped the central stress on science and technology would pay off handsomely.

"Malaysian scientists must be moved by a desire to apply science for the good of mankind."

He said as the home of ancient civilisations, Asia led the world in science and technology for a considerable period.

"This leadership was lost ... and we suffered a period of colonialism due to the technological superiority of others."

But Asians should be proud in that we had not used our technology to improve our capacity to destroy Man and his civilisation.

"Asian scientists should cherish the high purpose of their scientific learning and not be made the instruments of people with ruthless ambition.

"With the current political stability and conducive economic climate in the major part of the Asian continent we may now return to the moral high ground of applying learning for the betterment of mankind."

Later, Dr Mahathir presented certificates of appointment to 50 foundation fellows of the academy, 10 from medical sciences, nine each from engineering sciences and biological sciences, seven from science and technology development and industry, five from mathematical and physical sciences, four each from chemical sciences and information technology.