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Mahathir-Science

PM CALLS FOR BALANCED APPROACH TO SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said a balanced approach to science and technology development is an important pre-requisite for Malaysia to be scientifically and technologically progressive.

He said this is because nations today look to science and technology for salvaging stagnant economies and overcoming misery and poverty.

Malaysians, he said, need to focus on applied research and look for what is relevant and useful to them and society.

"Research for the sake of knowledge may eventually result in something useful, but we do not have the money or the time for this luxury," he said in his speech at the Academy of Sciences Award presentation dinner here tonight.

Dr Mahathir was awarded a honorary fellowship by the academy for his significant contribution and commitment to the growth of science and technology in Malaysia.

He said recognising the importance of infrastructure as one of the pre-requisites for a sustained science and technology development, Malaysia has established agencies such as Malaysian Technology Development Corporation (MTDC), Malaysian Industry-Government Group on High Technology (MIGHT) and Malaysian Invention and Design Society (MINDS).

Dr Mahathir said the trend towards globalisation of business requires a strong public and private sector partnership and coordination of available technological resources to mutually benefit businesses operating in a number of host countries.

"This government-industry partnership must work towards strengthening our current comparative advantage so as to sustain, and even enhance, our competitiveness," he said.

He said concerted effort is needed in strengthening the indigenous technological capacity and capability to ensure acquisition of foreign technology.

"We can expect that others will not transfer all their technology to us. But we need to know as much of the basics as possible for us to develop the rest. We must remember that when we come upon anything new and valuable in terms of our own research, we do not rush to transfer it to others," he said.

"Indeed, our culture was against the transfer of our specialised skills to others. Thus, while Western doctors report regularly in the medical journals about their findings in the treatment of some diseases or other, our `dukuns' and `bomohs' would never dream of telling anyone their secret cure. And so many useful cures died with the practitioner," he said.

He said Malaysians should get over the cultural mental block and should report discoveries as it is good for the progress of mankind.

He said they could be rewarded for reporting discoveries, a recognition by society through awards such as the Nobel Prize, and patent the discovery to be paid royalty for the rights, but the worst thing that could be done was to carry that knowledge and skills to the grave.

"Let us think of this sometimes when we complain about others not wanting to transfer technology to us," he said.

He said for many Malaysians, science and technology is still strange and even incomprehensible but it will not remain strange for long if effort is applied to mastering them.

Dr Mahathir said there was no magic in the discoveries and inventions by the great societies and technological geniuses.

"It was a matter of applying known scientific laws to differing situations repeatedly and tirelessly, using all the techniques and instruments available until the correct formula is found," he said.

Describing inspirations as useful, he said hard work counts more.

"We need not be geniuses to make scientific or technological advancements, but we do need to be determined and dedicated," he said.

He said the vision of making Malaysia a scientifically progressive, innovative and forward-looking society is not a dream because the country since independence in 1957 had recognised the importance of science and technology in development, enshrined it in the Rukunegara and incorporated it in the national education system.

Dr Mahathir said he was happy the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, since its inauguration in September last year, has been able to formulate and implement programmes that impact on creating science and technology awareness among the public through its workshops, public lectures and orations on subjects related to the latest developments in the field. --

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