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Dr M calls on inventors to share technology

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on inventors to
change their old mindset of being "selfish" with their inventions.

Referring to the grumbles of certain quarters on the lack of technology
transfer among inventors, the Prime Minister said often those who had the
technology were against technology transfer while those without the
technology had expected inventors to share it with them.

"What we forget is that we are very often against technology transfer
when we have the technology... when others have the technology, we would
like them to transfer it to us," he said at the third session of the
Langkawi International Dialogue which was attended by other heads of
Government.

Dr Mahathir was the moderator of the session which focused on technology
for emerging economies.

In stressing his point, Dr Mahathir cited a habit among Malay bomohs who
were normally selfish about sharing their knowledge.

"In Malaysia, we used to have traditional medicine and all the bomohs,
village doctors or witch doctors, they know how to cure people," he said,
"but they will never tell you how they did it".

"They keep the knowledge to themselves because it is a secret... because
they have discovered this and they want to make something out of what they
discovered so they will never transfer their technology.

"Sometimes if they are generous enough they transfer their technology to
their own children.

"As a result, their knowledge is not spread out and cannot be fully
utilised and then of course these people being mortal, they all die and
the technology dies with them.

Fortunately, Dr Mahathir said there was a different view now.

"When you have some knowledge, you should share it... you should write
in journals, you should discuss it and you should make full use of your
technology".

Because of the advent of property rights, there is still money to be
made out of transferring technology by earning royalties.

"So I think we have to change our mindset about that... I hope we won't
have any more Malay bomohs in Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir quipped that he had also been referred to as a Malay bomoh
because of his training.

"But I am quite happy to transfer whatever technology I don't have to
people who have," he said, drawing laughter from the floor.

Earlier, at the beginning of the session, the Prime Minister spoke about
Malaysia's industrialisation process which started with labour intensive
industries.

But as this grew, there was a shortage of manpower to meet the needs of
industry.

"Malaysia now enjoys full employment and as a result we have to import
foreign labour," he said. "But the country cannot afford to have too many
foreign workers".

Therefore, he said Malaysia needed to move away from labour intensive
industries into high technology industries where labour was minimised.

"We need to train our workers to understand new technologies. They are
no longer going to do things themselves like assembling, manipulating or
shaping things with their own hands, but rather they will be able to

maintain and service robots and automated machines which will do most of the work," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the workers needed to be trained on how to service and even how to produce some of these machines "because it has become necessary for us." "We have to learn that kind of technology. So it is a progressive thing, he said.

"From merely putting things together, assembling things and doing things manually, operating machines which assemble things, we have now advanced to operating and servicing machines which will do the work for us, and eventually the production of these very robots and automated machines.

So there is a progression here. It is not possible, I think, to suddenly leapfrog from a very low technology state of development to a very high technology environment.

"We are of course very ambitious here in Malaysia, but we know there is a limit to what we can do," he added.

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