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Dr Mahathir ticks off manufacturers for not using local materials

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Manufacturers were again ticked off today for not using enough local materials in their industries.

Citing rubber as an example, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said its use in the various mega projects being implemented was not encouraging.

"This is probably because local consultants, architects and engineers have not received adequate exposure (on our materials).

"As such, I hope policymakers and others involved in future mega projects are exposed to our own materials," he said when opening the RM5.7 million Malaysian International Rubber Products Exhibition Centre in Sungai Buloh.

A brainchild of Dr Mahathir, the exhibition centre located on a 1,469 sq metre site is set to play a catalytic role in stimulating and nurturing interest in the Malaysian rubber industry.

The centre has well-trained staff and state-of-the-art equipment to assist entrepreneurs who are keen to explore the rubber industry.

Dr Mahathir said: "We must create confidence (among people) in our rubber-based products not only for use in mega projects but all development projects. I hope in future due emphasis will be given to our own products in development projects.

"If we ourselves are not willing to use our products, obviously foreigners will have less confidence in them."

Dr Mahathir said for far too long Malaysia had been producing goods for international companies which in turn sold them at higher prices as branded products.

"Although we produce these high quality goods, our returns are low," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was time for Malaysians to invent, design and produce these goods under their own brand names.

"There is no reason why we cannot market our own products if the prices are reasonable," he said, adding that it would only be a matter of time before Malaysian products were accepted just like other foreign brands.

Dr Mahathir said as Malaysia was able to market the Standard Malaysian Rubber successfully, its rubber-based products would be well received.

He added that although Malaysia's utilisation of rubber had exceeded the figure under the Industrial Master Plan, there were plans to diversify the production of rubber-based goods.

"This is because our industries are concentrated more on rubber-dipped products. Continued efforts should be made to diversify the manufacturing sector to further strengthen it."

Dr Mahathir said the export value of rubber increased from RM390 million in 1986 to RM4.2 billion last year.

The export value of rubber-based products had exceeded the export value of raw rubber since 1992, except in 1995 when the price of rubber was very high.

Dr Mahathir said one of the approaches under the Second Industrial Master Plan was to diversify the rubber-based products industry and to encourage the production of a variety of rubber products.

"This is to ensure that we are not too dependent on rubber-dipped goods such as gloves, catheters and latex thread."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was planning to build a "Rubber City"

under the Seventh Malaysia Plan.

"It is expected to house the Malaysian Rubber Board and its laboratories, the Rubber Industrial Park, as well as housing and recreational facilities."

Also present at the opening ceremony were Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, ministry secretary-general Haron Siraj and Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia director Datuk Dr Abdul Aziz Sheikh Abdul Kadir.

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