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Mahathir: Move into higher technology

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday re-emphasised the need to move into higher technology and reduce dependence on foreign labour.

"We can say that we have been successful in the process of industrialising Malaysia, and what we need now is to move into higher technology," he said at a luncheon organised by the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said existing industries are too labour-intensive and at the same time the country is facing a manpower shortage.

"We need to switch to industries which have lower labour content, but an increase in technology content in particular," he said.

The Prime Minister cited Japan's success in this area.

"During my recent visit to Japan, I noticed that the waiters are Japanese. I am told that there are some foreign workers in Japan but their numbers are very small in comparison with the size of the country.

"It begs the question as to why the Japanese with an economy that is bigger - certainly more than six times bigger than Malaysia and therefore with an economy six times ours - are not dependent on foreign labour when they should have.

"We still find Japanese working wherever we go in the hotels and shops. It means that they have managed their manpower much better than we have. They have increased the income of their people, they have employed their people in so-called low grade work also and yet they are able to make enough money for themselves.

"So we have to understand how we could reduce dependence on labour and move into areas where there is not so big a labour content yet it will give us the kind of economic growth that we are aiming for," he said.

And one way, Dr Mahathir added, is to reduce labour-intensive industries by opting for robotics and automation in production, which are hi-tech.

"And the rest, of course, is going into industries that do not depend on labour," he said.

Dr Mahathir said hi-tech industries should not depend on labour but require higher skill labour.

"Our people must be upgraded in their skills and this, I would like to stress once again, is possible. We can upgrade the skills of our people. The only thing is that we must make a determined effort to acquire the skills and the knowledge as well as to be willing to invest in industries that involve hi-tech, and in most instances, the investment required is not very big," he said.

Dr Mahathir also launched Might's website at [www.primenet.com.my](http://www.primenet.com.my), which will serve as an information base for businesses.

Might is registered as a non-profit company, and is managed by the Special Unit for High Technology under the Office of the Science Adviser in the Prime Minister's Department.

In his address, Might joint chairman Tan Sri Tajudin Ramli said: "It would not be excessive to say that Might is Malaysia Incorporated in action with the members of the public and private sector work together to help strengthen the country."

The members of Might, he said, not only supply funds, but also give the more important assistance in the form of ideas and personnel, especially at the expert level.

This is done through the Might Interest Groups, of which there are nine, covering the areas of aerospace, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, advance materials, road haulage, construction and housing, no-emission vehicles, environmental and clean technology, and automobiles.

"It is through this approach that Might has achieved a few successes. Once again I call on the members to come forward together and give contributions and lead the MIGs."

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