

22/07/1997

PM's technical questions caught director off guard

OKAYAMA (Japan), Mon: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has proven that he is still a practised medical doctor when he asked several technical and scientific questions during his visit to Hayashibara Biochemical Laboratories Inc here today.

The company's director Dr Mashashi Kurimoto said he was caught off guard when the Prime Minister asked specific technical and scientific questions on microbiology, enzymology and life sciences.

"I was surprised that for a person from a political background he asked such questions. Our research and development centre received quite a lot of visitors mainly from the political and business fields.

"But, Dr Mahathir asked very scientific and technical questions. This is the first time I was asked such questions by a political leader," he told reporters after briefing Dr Mahathir at the 3 billion yen (100 yen = RM2.27) centre in Kibi, near here.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived in Japan on July 17, was on a six-day working and private visit to Okayama and Toyama prefectures.

He is scheduled to depart for Kuala Lumpur tomorrow after a two-month vacation since May 19.

Kurimoto said the Prime Minister had, among others, asked him to explain whether the laboratories at the centre can be contaminated with micro-organisms while scientists carried out their research, to which he replied that he was also not allowed to enter the laboratories as a safety measure.

"Dr Mahathir also asked questions on Aids ... how we treat and fight this disease.

"Currently, we are also carrying out an experiment on a new bioactive substance for cancer. This will be produced here," he added.

Hayashibara Biochemical Laboratories is a subsidiary of diversified Hayashibara Group. Established in 1970, the company was set up to capitalise on Hayashibara's expertise in microbiology, enzymology and life sciences.

The company produces and sells enzymes and other reagents and licenses patents and propriety expertise. In 1979, the Hayashibara method was developed for manufacturing bioactive substances.

On its turnover, Kurimoto said the company's annual sales of its products was about US\$600 million (US\$1 = RM2.61).

"Our operating cost, including for the international market was about 10 trillion yen and we produce between 50gms and 60gms of interferon (a bioactive substance used for the treatment of cancer and viral diseases) a year," he added.

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