

11/10/1998

PM: Be more flexible in giving out funds for R&D

Ashraf Abdullah; Hayati Hayatudin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today government officials in charge of research and development should be less bureaucratic and be more imaginative and flexible when considering applications for funds from researchers and research institutes.

The Prime Minister said so much funds allocated for R&D were not utilised simply because these officers placed emphasis on direct returns resulting in researchers on important projects being denied of necessary funds.

"Much talent go to waste simply because the returns on investments in research are difficult to quantify," he said when opening the International Invention, Innovation, Industrial Design and Technology Exhibition at Sunway Pyramid.

ITEX '98 is jointly organised by Malaysian Invention and Design Society and Sirim Berhad.

Later, when speaking to reporters Dr Mahathir said he was not very happy with the growth of R&D in the country.

"We have funds for R&D but they are not being utilised. One of the problems is that the people who are controlling the funds cannot appreciate what the research centres or the researchers want to do. We will have to have a different criteria."

Dr Mahathir said it was difficult for a person who was not an inventor or a researcher to assess somebody else's ideas.

"We have to make it more flexible."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said it was important for businesses to invest in innovative and creative R&D.

He said without such investments, businesses were condemning themselves to rapid obsolescence.

"Nothing can be more dangerous for companies than to treat investments in R&D as a peripheral item.

"To be in business is to be in the business of innovation. Those who fail to innovate will perish."

Dr Mahathir said even those in developing countries could come up with innovative inventions.

"No one has a monopoly of the skills of inventing. If the facilities and the funds are available, then results can be quite predictable.

"And so many scientists from developing countries have been found to be as capable or even more inventive than those from developed countries when they migrate to the rich countries where the facilities and funds are readily available."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia, faced with the financial crisis, had to resort to radical and unusual ways to deal with an unusual situation.

"The repercussions on the economy would have been worse if Malaysia did not do anything."

He said Malaysia's decision to fix the ringgit's exchange rate was both inventive and innovative.

"Inventiveness in economic and financial management is no different from inventiveness in the other fields.

"Orthodoxy will cause stagnation, conservatives never progress and those who fear change will be condemned to wither where they stand."

Dr Mahathir said the failure of the Long Term Capital Management hedge fund had forced Western Governments to look more closely at currency

trading with the International Monetary Fund, admitting the need to regulate currency trading.

(END)