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Scientists urged to develop own technology

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysian scientists were today urged to develop their own technology and engineering innovations to help reduce the cost of technology.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said such innovations could also be exported to reverse the flow of royalty Malaysia had been paying.

He said as Malaysia was a developing country, the royalty paid for imported technology yearly was very high.

"This is, of course, a drain on our foreign exchange earnings.

"At this time of economic turmoil, we cannot afford this outflow of funds.

"Malaysia would do well to spend money on research, especially applied research.

"The economic recovery can be speeded up and we may emerge from the turmoil stronger," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dinner hosted by the Academy of Sciences Malaysia.

The Prime Minister also said he was made to understand that there were a number of research facilities which were hardly utilised.

He added that while the equipment was provided for, there was a reluctance to apply research or to allocate funds for research work.

"This is indeed unfortunate. The institution concerned should make a study of the facilities available, and determine how to utilise them more fully.

"If we don't have enough researchers we should be willing to employ foreign personnel," he said.

The Prime Minister then issued a challenge to the scientific community to produce a Nobel Laureate by the year 2020, calling on them to transform Malaysia into a world player in science and technology.

He said over the years, local scientists had achieved major breakthroughs in the fields of science, engineering and technology.

"Although these breakthroughs are sporadic, they indicate that Malaysia possesses scientists and researchers who are capable of high-level research.

"We have formulated the policy, built the infrastructure and allocated the financial resources.

"But beyond that, we need the scientific and industrial community to push it further," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the latest effort by the Government to strengthen the country's economic position was the establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor, through which Malaysia would compete in the new information era.

The Prime Minister added that while there was a great deal of pressure for the opening up of countries and markets to everyone today, there was not that much pressure for science, engineering and technology to be made available to every country and everyone.

"In fact, the pressure to protect intellectual property is greater today than at any time in history.

"The machinery of international institutions and those of powerful national governments are mobilised to protect intellectual property as never before.

"There seems to be something wrong in this.

"Why is it that while markets cannot be protected, markets which may be the sole asset of poor countries, intellectual properties must be protected at all costs?" he said.

Saying that a choice must be made, Dr Mahathir said if Malaysia wished to protect intellectual property "then we must also protect markets".

He said alternatively, the world should insist on markets and intellectual property being equally free for everyone.

The Prime Minister also called on the scientific community to innovate and create, to continuously challenge old thinking with new ideas and to continuously search for new knowledge and solutions.

"We have to strive for excellence and, in the process, transform Malaysia into one of the world players in science and technology."

He said scientists and researchers should exploit government infrastructure and facilities to deliver their results.

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