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#### Efficient co-ordination of R&D

IN this competitive global business environment, a country's economic success will be increasingly determined by its ability to master, assimilate and adapt new technologies to produce new or improved products. It goes without saying that this can only be achieved through intensive research and development and promotion of an efficient system of innovation.

Malaysians have just been reminded anew of the importance of the nation's strong commitment to research and development. At the Made-in-Malaysia exposition in the Federal capital last week, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Wong See Wah pointed out the need for further developing R&D expertise to facilitate the production of more local goods. This will help cut down on the annual hefty imports. When R&D is in full swing and sensitive to the demand for better and cheaper local raw materials, more products could be introduced as substitutes to imports.

It could be recalled that way back in 1996, Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, then Economic Adviser to the Government, outlined an important agenda for Malaysia's growth and development. He told a Malaysian Institute of Management gathering that in the decade to come, there would be a need for a national drive for much greater efficiency. There has to be a massive productivity push if Malaysia is to achieve its Vision 2020 goals. At the very core of the essential productivity push has to be "much greater technology fluency, much greater technology prowess in every area of Malaysian life, economic and non-economic spheres".

Daim has hit the nail on the head for, indeed, new directions in industrial policy must provide for ways that will promote high value-added content, low imports and high revenue-earning activities. Research organisations have to shift gear to a total-factor productivity strategy where R&D and development projects adhere to the principles of enhancing productivity, promoting new technological development and ultimately contributing to greater wealth creations.

In the light of the country's economic downturn giving rise to scarce financial resources, it is vital that whatever funds allocated to R&D be utilised in the best possible manner. It is high time, too, that the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry took a review of the unsatisfactory situation of R&D in this country. It should have taken cue from the oft-repeated statement that although Malaysia has research institutes and universities undertaking substantial R&D, these have little commercial relevance. Conversely, the private sector is not undertaking sufficient R&D. And lately, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself expressed unhappiness over the growth of R&D in this country.

The key is efficient national co-ordination. Hitherto, there is no doubt that bureaucratic red tape is the biggest impediment to the rapid processing of applications and disbursements of funds. Perhaps, a special council, comprising mostly entrepreneurs and industrialists, should undertake this vital task of co-ordination to ensure that the country's R&D efforts are heading in the right direction. To attain a highly competitive economy in the next millennium, it is imperative that Malaysians switch from the current "can do" attitude to a "can do better" spirit. The indomitable will to do better is the ingredient that will separate us from the herd.

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