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Be receptive, urges PM

Abdul Razak Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged Malaysians to adopt a more receptive attitude towards new ideas and innovations in cutting-edge technology, although they may at first seem "fantastic".

Specifically, he urged civil servants not to be too quick to dismiss these novel ideas presented for their evaluation in the form of proposals or licensing applications.

"Sometimes the private sector comes up with 'fantastic' ideas ... but to people who do not understand, the tendency is to be suspicious.

"When we do this, the project doesn't take off, and we miss an opportunity to collect taxes and many other benefits that can be made with this new technology," said Dr Mahathir after being briefed on the operations of the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT) operations here.

Dr Mahathir, who is MIGHT patron, was updated on the organisation's operations by its chief executive Dr Ahmed Tasir Lope Pihie. MIGHT joint chairman Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman also briefed Dr Mahathir on the latest regarding the upcoming Maputo and Langkawi sessions of the International Smart Partnership Dialogue 2000.

Delivering his advice and observations after the briefing, Dr Mahathir pointed out how a general lack of knowledge on high technology by the civil service contributed to suspicions regarding proposals on innovative technologies.

"Because we are not knowledgeable about the technology we may be very hesitant, but in certain cases we actually obstruct the implementation of whatever project that is being proposed."

At the same time, however, Dr Mahathir said it was important to be careful when deciding whether or not to support proposals from people who submit ideas but have nothing else to back them with - as was the case with Internet start-ups known as the dotcom company.

"Among dotcom companies, the most important thing is to get listed; and when it (the share price) is high enough, the man with the original idea might suddenly cash in and opt out.

"That is why we were suspicious of the dotcom companies ... their share prices should reflect something more tangible than just the idea that comes with the person."

This, he added, was where MIGHT could step in as it was formed to prospect for business opportunities for Malaysia through the strategic exploitation of high technology.

"The idea of having MIGHT is to enable the Government to interact with the private sector and to try and understand the technologies.

"But even if you fail to understand, be more sympathetic, more supportive so that the idea can come to something and can generate wealth and jobs," the Prime Minister said.

He commended MIGHT's efforts to focus on potentially lucrative endeavours such as in the herbal industry and composite technology.

"We should try and focus on certain things which have real potential and go at it in a very systematic way - even losing money over a period of time.

"But you will eventually make something if you follow through."

A willingness to evaluate and consider novel ideas, said the Prime

Minister, led to projects like the Multimedia Super Corridor, and even strategic masterplans like Vision 2020.

Dr Mahathir said both ideas did not originate from him.

"Someone else came up with these very good ideas, and I gave it my stamp - and then it was called my idea," he said.

Getting credited for other people's good ideas, Dr Mahathir jokingly remarked, was one of the benefits of having an open mind.

The Prime Minister later launched the Advanced Composite and Aerospace directories at the same function.

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