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K-economy master plan by September (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysia will adopt a national strategic plan by this September to launch the country into a knowledge-driven economy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the Government had begun drafting the K-economy master plan, and many of the vital measures to be taken would be incorporated in the Budget to be tabled in October.

A series of concrete plans of action will also be completed within a year.

"The whole process of national consultation, brainstorming, drafting and national mobilisation should be completed within 18 months from this day," he said in outlining Malaysia's "second step" in its quantum leap into the Information Age.

The first step was Vision 2020 and Malaysia has now embarked on its second step - the Strategic Initiative One - to remake Malaysian corporations and reinvent Malaysian society.

Dr Mahathir was delivering a key-note address at the second Global Knowledge Conference attended by over 1,000 international participants. He said the K-economy master plan would not be drafted by the best brains behind closed doors because it must be relevant to every Malaysian and become a personal master plan for all.

Describing K-economy as "the maximum application of knowledge to every Malaysian economic and business endeavour", he said the master plan must belong to all Malaysians.

Saying he wanted to give his "two cents' worth", Dr Mahathir outlined several features which he felt was needed for the transition into a K-economy - investment in education, "brain gain" and supply of information.

He said Malaysia must invest in the "passion" and capabilities of the people involved in education, from librarians to professors, as well as lay the foundation for learning at the primary level.

He also said Malaysia must reach out into the world to attract the best brains, "we must take them wherever they are from."

Expanding on the "brain gain", he said the country must aim to reduce the number of foreign workers by 100,000 a year, reducing the number of low-knowledge workers by 95,000 annually while accepting 5,000 "extraordinary world citizens".

On information supply, he said Malaysia must have a first-rate national media system where the Internet would have a large part, while maintaining the importance of newspapers, magazines, books, radio and television.

"This country must most seriously enhance the production and supply of information, knowledge and wisdom and assure their accessibility to all our people," he said.

This, he said, would mean doing away with the "hallowed sulit (secrecy) syndrome" and killing the "great information hoard" in companies, universities and civil service.

"The private and public sectors will need to operate according to new rules of transparency, new regulations for disclosure, new processes of corporate and public sector governance," he said.

Dr Mahathir also explained that the Strategic Initiative One did not mean that Malaysia would abandon its industrial backbone which provided one-third of the jobs and 37 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product.

"We live and die on trade," he said.

He added that the basic structure of the Malaysian economy would not fundamentally change in the short and medium term.

The shift to a K-economy would, however, mean that the knowledge content and contribution would take a quantum leap, "the Malaysian economy and Malaysia's society will not be quite the same again".

On the theme of his address Transcending the Divide, Dr Mahathir alluded to the divide between materially-wealthy and materially-poor countries, and between knowledge-rich and knowledge-poor countries.

As human life hinged more than ever on knowledge, he said there was an urgent need to bridge this great divide.

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