

09/03/2000

PM outlines strategies to achieve k-economy

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IF VISION 2020 represents the first strategic step into the Information Age, the next step is to effect a quantum leap which will re-make Malaysian corporations and re-invent Malaysian society, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In outlining the "Strategic Initiative One" of the 21st Century to steer the country towards a knowledge-based economy, or k-economy, he said the Government has already started the process of drafting the K-Economy Master Plan mentioned in the 2000 Budget.

"By the end of September this year, Insya Allah, we will adopt a National Strategic Plan. Many of the vital measures that will need to be taken will be incorporated in the budget to be presented in October this year," Dr Mahathir said at the opening of the Second World Knowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"A series of concrete Plans of Action in Key Strategic Areas will be completed within one year. The whole process of national consultation, brainstorming, drafting and national mobilisation should be completed within 18 months from this day," he said.

What needs to be done include developing excellent educational systems, and achieving the highest standards with regards to skills, devotion to knowledge, self-improvement, and language competence, the Prime Minister said.

"We must bring outstanding Malaysians who have matured elsewhere back to their country. But equally importantly, in the days ahead we must reach out to the four corners of the world to ensure a massive brain gain, an infusion of men and women of extraordinary talent, creativity, knowledge, skill and other capabilities. We must take them wherever they are from," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the time will come soon when Malaysia has to set the target of reducing the number of foreign workers in the country by 100,000 a year; and the number of unskilled, low-knowledge workers by 95,000.

At the same time, the economy and society must be enriched through the annual infusion of 5,000 extraordinary world citizens of extraordinary talent, creativity, knowledge, skill, and networking.

"The whole area of human capital is critical to our performance and global competitiveness. But much, much more needs to be done," Dr Mahathir said.

For example, Malaysia requires a first-rate National Media System, which will include the Internet and other IT innovations. Newspapers, magazines, books, television and radio will remain important as they will be increasingly accessed through the Internet.

"This country must most seriously enhance the production and supply of information, knowledge and wisdom to ensure their accessibility to all our people in every area of work.

"Functional literacy must be broadened to all, including the very old. We must aim for 100 per cent basic IT literacy. We must vigorously build on our language skills," Dr Mahathir added.

There will also be a need for reform in the private and public sectors, in particular to do away with the traditional "sulit syndrome" or "Great Information Hoard", where information is coveted, hidden and hoarded.

"They will have to operate according to new rules of transparency, new regulations for disclosure, new processes of corporate and public sector

governance," he said.

In the process, Malaysia must make sure that the short- and long-term social effects are fully understood and proactively responded to, and equity and social justice are never neglected.

"We must be prepared to examine every sacred cow, to give up every preconceived notion ... to face reality. We must embrace change, pursue novelty, crave innovation. We must learn. Harder still, we must unlearn.

"We must remember to forget old ways. We must force ourselves into new habits. We must build the new processes, institutions and organisations that are necessary for the Information Age."

He stressed that the pursuit of "Strategic Initiative One" does not mean the abandonment of the country's industrial backbone, which today contributes more than 37 per cent of the gross domestic product and provides 30 per cent of all jobs.

"We are among the most industrialised economies on earth and we are not going to fall down the industrial ladder, no matter how many will try to push or pull us off. We are also one of the most open economies...we live and we die on trade. Last year, more than 85 per cent of our exports were manufactured goods," he said.