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Venture abroad, PM again advises local entrepreneurs

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Reading a piece of advice he got from a book on Mickey Mouse he won as a prize in his primary school days to a group of Malaysian businessmen, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today again called on them to venture abroad.

The Prime Minister said Malaysians still had an inferiority complex about venturing out.

"We still think we are second rate... we should be more confident of ourselves and be prepared to do things that are different from what we used to do, to be pioneers, plucky pioneers, to be less orthodox," he said when opening the Malaysian Structural Steel Association convention and exhibition 2000 in Seri Kembangan, near here.

The advice from the Mickey Mouse book read: "Go West young man was a good advice. So Mickey thought it would be nice, to try his luck both far and near and be a plucky pioneer."

Dr Mahathir said although the words from the book were not that of a great sage or philosopher, he was inspired by it.

Malaysian businessmen, he said, must learn to work under less congenial conditions and should be able to compete both at home and abroad.

They would have to learn to be on their own as the Government would not be able to protect them forever, he added.

"There is no reason why Malaysians cannot bid for construction works even in the developed countries. We have the capability and we can achieve world standards," he said, adding that many countries in the South were keen to have Malaysian builders construct infrastructure.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians would not try anything that had not been approved by the experts, especially foreigners.

"Their standards are foreign standards and when these standards differ, they find themselves unable to handle the problem.

"Thus, if they are used to British standards and measurements, they seem unable to switch to the metric system and vice versa," he said.

Malaysia, which had broken from its past orthodoxy and pioneered new ways of dealing with its development, would have never progressed this far if it had remained wedded to the old ways.

He also spoke on the need for more research and development in the usage of steel in Malaysia.

The dumping of products by the big economies made it difficult for a viable steel industry to thrive in Malaysia.

To strengthen the steel industry, industrialists and their engineers must look around for more products which they could fabricate for local use and for export.

If local steel millers could keep their costs low, they could supply construction and other steel products to the rest of the world.

Apart from the private sector, Dr Mahathir said, the Government, through its various agencies must also play an important role in shaping the construction industry.

"Our construction companies working abroad will help to introduce Malaysian steel. Eventually, we can have a big enough demand to support a full-scale steel-making industry," he said.

Dr Mahathir also reminded industrialists to find alternative building materials to replace those extracted from rivers and hills.

He said if more steel was used in the construction industry, the demand

for sand, aggregates and cement would be reduced.

"Our hills and rivers would then be able to stay intact and our environment saved," he added.

Later, Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Malaysian Structural Steel Association and four universities to encourage interaction between educational institutions and the industry.

The four universities are International Islamic University, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir also presented prizes to winners of two competitions organised by the association. (See Page 5)

In the open ideas competition, the first prize went to Veritas Architects followed by Integrated Design Network Sdn Bhd and Arkitek Binarjaya which won second and third prizes respectively. They each won RM10,000, RM7,000 and RM5,000 respectively.

In the Undergraduates Prize Awards, all three top prizes went to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

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