

Mahathir: Highlight close link of science and religion

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PETALING JAYA: A subject that stresses the close link between science and religion should be introduced to motivate schoolchildren, particularly Malay pupils, to take up science courses, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Such a subject should explain the history of the Islamic empire and contribution of scientists and researchers to Islam, the Prime Minister said.

It should also explain that those who made advances in science included Islamic scholars, he said during a dia-

logue session with more than 100 Malay researchers and scientists at the Science Convention 2001 here.

A participant had asked Dr Mahathir his view on how to give due recognition to science and how to increase the number of scientists.

The two-day event was organised by Institut Ibnu Sina of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and the National Security Division of the Prime Minister's Department.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that if science was regarded a part of Islamic teachings, the country would

be able to produce more scientists among the Malays.

He said the ratio of scientists in the country is 700 to a million population. If only Malay scientists are considered, the ratio is possibly 200 to a million population, he added.

Dr Mahathir said it was important to correct the perception that science is to be learnt in isolation to religion.

"Religious teachers should explain to students that science is equivalent to religious courses like *fiqah* and *Syariah*.

"I know of an engineer who sent his three sons to an Arab country to take up religious

courses because he thought he had made a mistake of taking up engineering instead of acquiring religious knowledge.

"He failed to remember the great contribution made by engineers to Islamic society."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was willing to consider adequate allocation for fundamental science research at local universities.

Asked whether the Government has plans to give incentives to science teachers, he said: "We are willing but others will demand for it too.

"We will find some means to give it to them without caus-

ing problems to others."

On the difficulty by some researchers to get funds from the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry, Dr Mahathir said he had advised ministry officials to be sympathetic towards scientists seeking research allocations.

"We can give allocation although we can't guarantee how much. But scientists should convince non-scientists about the relevance of their research projects."

Later at a press conference, Dr Mahathir said the Government was drafting a blueprint for space science.