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Mahathir-Scientists

DO NOT LET ISSUE OF INCENTIVES BE A DISTRACTION, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 5 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded local scientists not to let the question of incentives, including monetary ones, distract them from doing research.

He said they should not be comparing returns earned by businessmen who outwardly appeared to be better off.

"If at all jealousy does prevail, it should not be a cause of much distress so much so we are not able to concentrate on other matters," he said at a dialogue with scientists attending the 2001 Science Convention at Seri Kembangan near here.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged that presently no monetary incentives were given to scientists.

"However, we can consider giving them to those who come up with research papers or make discoveries that contribute to knowledge," he said.

The two-day convention, which ended today, carried the theme "knowledge consolidation through research in aerospace science". It was jointly organised by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Institut Ibnu Sina (IIS) and the National Security Division of the Prime Minister's Department.

Dr Mahathir called for more scientists to be involved in fundamental/basic science studies, from which they could subsequently develop applications that could be commercialised.

He concurred with one of the participants who suggested that a national science laboratory be set up to carry out research in basic sciences but the prime minister emphasised that the proposal proper should come from the scientific community itself.

Just as UTM's IIS is a research entity involved in basic science studies, other local universities too should have similar institutions to strengthen the local knowledge pool, he said.

As for financing of research projects, Dr Mahathir said the scientists themselves should be able to convince fund managers of the significance of their research proposals.

The prime minister assured the scientists that the government would provide whatever physical facilities required for scientific research as it recognised the role that scientific advancement could play in nation-building.

On the country's small population of scientists, notably among the Malays, Dr Mahathir said a possible contributory factor was that curiosity was not part of the Malay characteristics.

Dr Mahathir said the Malays tend to be contented with their surrounding and would not bother about asking too many questions.

"The culture of the inquiring mind is vital. If it is nurtured from the beginning, we could have produced so many able scientists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was convinced that Malays were not much different from the other races intelligence-wise but the problem was that the Malays did not place importance on science.

Dr Mahathir said even the existing education system also put less emphasis on developing students to be an inquisitive lot.

"We just absorb and memorise things. If we teach our children to be more observant and inquiring, then only then we can develop scientists who have the correct attitude towards research," he said.

It was also necessary to discard the notion held by certain people that science has no link with religion.

"I am convinced that once the mindset is changed to regard mastering science is a religious obligation, we shall have more people interested in learning science," he said.

When asked what made him appear to be constantly energetic in carrying his daily routine, Dr Mahathir replied that the key was to have high level of interest in one's work and duties.

Replying to questions at a media conference later, Dr Mahathir said the government was preparing a space science blueprint.

The convention has adopted several resolutions, which among other things, called for:

- \* the pursuit of space science research to create related scientific knowledge in atmospheric and sensory studies, gravity waves, communications, detection and prevention of natural disasters and defence systems;

- \* due recognition to be accorded to scientists in terms of remuneration, incentives, career advancement and bestowment of honours and titles on excellent scientists;

- \* increased allocation for R&D by raising the quantum from 0.3 per cent to 1.5 per cent of the GDP so that Malaysia remains at par with developed countries which set aside between three and five per cent of their GDP for R&D; and

- \* a review of the teaching of science and mathematics in schools for the purpose of enhancing students' inclination towards the two subjects.

For the same objective, the convention also called for a review of the training for science and mathematics teachers besides proposing quality certification of such teachers by determining that they firstly possess a degree in science plus a diploma in education and appropriate incentives.

-- BERNAMA  
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