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Govt to allocate more funds for scientific research

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government is willing to allocate more funds for research and development (R and D) activities and consider setting up more national laboratories to cater to such needs in the country.

"Scientists in this country should forward proposals to the Government on what their specific needs are and the Government will consider such requests.

"The Government will fund R and D activities in science so that we will not be left behind compared to scientists in Europe," he said.

Responding to requests for more financial incentives to be given to local scientists, Dr Mahathir said while such aspects are important to a certain extent, incentives alone should not be used to determine one's commitment to science.

"I believe in counting one's blessings. Don't allow the feeling of not getting enough incentives and rewards hinder you from committing yourself to your work.

"Interest in your work is what is more important. Reward is just not money, but the result of your work giving you job satisfaction," the Prime Minister told delegates at the 2001 Science Convention organised by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

Dr Mahathir applauded the efforts of UTM to train a group of science students in the university to become potential Nobel laureates. "We hope we can produce Nobel laureates in the future but, more importantly, we must be committed and serious in pursuing knowledge."

He said Muslims must develop a culture of curiosity because an inquisitive mind will lead to the development of scientific findings. "We must change our attitude towards science and if we improve in this aspect I believe the interest to study science will increase."

The Prime Minister also called on Muslims to discard the wrong perception that science does not go hand in hand with the teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir said there some Muslims who believe that Islam is just about prayers and acts of devotion and learning science is treated as taboo.

"We see that there is an inclination to take up religious studies at the expense of science subjects.

"We are not saying that one should not study religion but importance must also be given to the study of science. It is only through being experts in scientific knowledge that we can protect the interest of the Muslims.

"We should teach a subject in schools to introduce Muslims personalities such as Ar-Razi, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina who were not only great Muslim scientists but also learned in matters of religion," he added.

Citing Malaysia's involvement in the United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping mission in Bosnia, Dr Mahathir said the country was able to do so because it had a well-trained military force and the financial capacity.

"Our contribution of 1,500 military personnel was small but our role is still held in gratitude by the people of Bosnia to this day.

"Of course there are people who will not allow others to develop the country and they are willing to commit acts of terrorism," Dr Mahathir said.

He cited the acts of the Abu Sayyaf group, saying that they have not brought any positive results to their struggle but instead smeared the image of Islam.

The two-day convention was attended by about 300 participants who discussed, among others, ways of improving the quality of science education in universities and schools and the suggestion to increase the ratio of fundamental scientists to the population.

Dr Mahathir was also presented with resolutions and a proposal to introduce space science research in the country.

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