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PM pays tribute to spirit of Malaysians

Nuraina Samad; Joseph Bingkasan

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday paid tribute to Malaysians, saying they have the capabilities to realise their ambitions to produce or design "the most sophisticated things".

The Prime Minister said they have proven time and again that they can go ahead to make things which were thought to be impossible, especially in a developing country.

Dr Mahathir said this when opening 1st Silicon (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Malaysia's first 200mm wafer foundry. The company has its headquarters at the Sama Jaya Free Industrial Zone at Muara Tabuan in Kuching and a US office in San Jose, California.

He said the building of the factory for the manufacture of microchips is a "very meaningful success" for Malaysia as the country is entering the information age in which many businesses are multimedia-based.

He said microchips being vital components for many of today's products "have enabled us to do all kinds of marvellous things which we hardly imagined before.

"Today, because of the power of the microchip, at only a press of a small button, we can access information from all over the world. In fact, because of the microchip, we are able to control every bit of engineering."

Dr Mahathir congratulated the Sarawak Government for its success in setting up 1st Silicon, a factory that manufactures a product using "a very complicated and high tech process not usually associated with a developing country.

"These are things you see in developed countries ... but Malaysians are very ambitious and do not want to be left behind."

Dr Mahathir said it is the ordinary Malaysians who are pushing the country forward, faster than even he could imagine.

In fact, he said, it is not him who should be credited with pushing the country to accomplish great things such as the building of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, the holding of the Langkawi International Maritime and Air Show (Lima) or the Tour de Langkawi.

Dr Mahathir said all he thought of were a small airport to replace the already-congested Subang Airport, a little air show for small aircraft and a modest cycling tournament.

But it was Malaysians who went on to make a bigger and world-class airport and major international air show and cycling event.

"It was not my idea. I was trying to do a simple job and not trying to make it complicated," he said as the audience burst into laughter.

He said even in the high tech business, he was thinking about going into it modestly, by perhaps "just polishing wafers".

"But they went on to build 1st Silicon," he said, adding that the Sarawak Government was wise in getting "a very good technological partner" in Sharp Corporation of Japan.

Dr Mahathir said the digital world and information age are the future of Malaysians who must be prepared to take up challenges they may think are impossible to do.

"I know very well that we may feel that we are incapable but in the spirit of Malaysia Boleh, one day we are going to have all of the most sophisticated things which are seen or not seen today."

In his speech, Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said a

significant number of Malaysians who had acquired expertise, through working with established high-tech companies overseas, had returned to work in the country, with many of them at 1st Silicon.

He said as the company expands operations more job opportunities could be created for Malaysians now still working abroad.

"Those working here now have voluntarily come back even though the salary is less."

Taib said the establishment of the wafer fabrication plant was an initiative of the State Government, taken during the economic slowdown, and fully supported by the Federal Government

"It is the belief of the State Government that this high-tech industry will promote and sustain its efforts towards the economic transformation of the state," he added.

Company chairman Datuk Fong Joo Chung said it has 610 well-trained and dedicated workers, about 80 per cent of them locals, adding that the transfer of technical knowhow to the local workers will raise their numbers.

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