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Budget to reveal new strategies

M.K. Megan

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the 2003 Budget he will table on Sept 20 will adopt different strategies for further development of the country.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, thanked the business community for "rising as one" to a call to make Malaysia a better country.

He said Malaysia was in the process of achieving greater progress and development and still needed contributions from the business community.

Addressing members of the Malaysian South-South Association (MASSA) during its 10th anniversary dinner at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel tonight, he said Malaysia had managed well and was on the threshold of greater development.

"Malaysians, not too long ago, were comfortable and rather lazy. The only place they exported their products was to Singapore. Singapore reexported these items, earning a name as the biggest exporter of rubber, pepper and others.

"I have to lead the businessmen, or rather drag them, to cross oceans to look for business opportunities in 1991. That was how MASSA was born."

Dr Mahathir had mooted the idea of establishing MASSA after his visit to Chile, Brazil and Argentina with Malaysian businessmen that year.

He said since then, MASSA had been actively investing in various countries and even owns buildings in places like Santiago, Chile.

"Now they cross and re-cross oceans, not only to do business, but some even go to England just to watch football," he said in a lighter tone.

He said the business community had also spread the knowledge about Malaysia in their business ventures abroad.

"Malaysia was a totally unknown country before the war," he said, adding that it was the least known among the original five Asean countries of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.

"But now Malaysia is better known ... we are better developed and manage our country peacefully, besides the 1997 incident that we have overcome.

"Before, when we said we were from Malaysia, foreigners associated it with a country close to Singapore. We have to change it by making them say that Singapore is close to Malaysia," he added.