

25/12/2002

Provide more study grants to foreigners, firms urged

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on local companies and manufacturers to provide more scholarships for foreign students to study here which could help in the marketing of Malaysian-made products.

The Prime Minister said foreigners studying engineering here for instance, would become familiar with locally-made machines, including the quality and superiority of the products.

"When they return home to work after completing their studies, they will recommend our machines," he said after launching the first made-in-Malaysia Computer Numerical Control machine - the Master CNC 10HVA - at the Technology Park Malaysia.

Essential for milling, drilling and tapping work, the machine is capable of producing high-quality parts for the automotive, electric and electronics industries, medical and hydraulic equipment and the general industrial machine builders.

The model is produced by the CNC Manufacturing Centre, a centre envisaged two years ago by the Prime Minister as the future of manufacturing industries in Malaysia.

At present, CNC machines used by manufacturing companies in Malaysia are mostly imported from Australia, Germany, Japan and China.

Elaborating later at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir said companies should regard offering scholarships to foreign students as an investment.

"If we want to sell, people must know the capabilities and functions of our products. One way of doing this is to allow them to see things on their own.

"And the best way to achieve this is for them to study here and become familiar with our machines ... when they go home and work, they will recommend our products - so it is actually an investment."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia should not make the mistake committed by the British who some time ago raised the fees for Malaysian students.

"I told them they were making a mistake because if our engineers were trained there, all they would think of when tasked to do something back home would be all British (products).

"But if they are familiar with Japanese machines (because of studying in Japan), they are not going to recommend British machines in their work. So, it is a mistake ... from getting a few dollars more (in fees), they are losing on exports."

He said Malaysia would continue sending its students overseas especially for courses in areas it had little expertise such as aerospace engineering.

"Even in the field of information technology, things are moving rapidly that we have to pick up fast. But at the same time, we should develop our own capabilities; we should be innovative and pioneer something new so that people will come to us."

When pointed out it was the Government which had always succeeded in manufacturing high-tech machines and technology, the Prime Minister said this was because the R&D culture was yet to be the norm in the private sector, except for some inroads made in the agriculture sector involving rubber and palm oil.

"Developing things involved lots of investment and you are competing with people well entrenched in the business. So it is a very dicey thing.

"Also, when good results are achieved, Malaysians do not seem keen to exploit them. This is the problem we are facing ... a mental block."

On next year's growth, Dr Mahathir, who is Finance Minister, said the economy was expected to register a similar performance to this year's forecast of between four and five per cent.

"One has to remember this year's growth is based on last year's which was very bad. Now if we perform well this year, to improve on that next year will become very difficult.

"Even if we are talking of one per cent, it is (still) one per cent above this year's performance."

On whether the projected four to five per cent growth for next year was a revision to the 6 to 6.5 per cent announced earlier, Dr Mahathir replied: "I am always very conservative."

On new measures to stimulate the economy, he said various steps had been taken; the Government could not make everything public lest it would lose the advantage.