

PM: Information exchange is vital

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BY LIM CHYE KHIM

BEIRUT: Malaysia believes information exchange is vital for a country's development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"We think we can learn from others and we are quite open to giving information to anyone who might think there is something to learn from us," he said.

"We have benefited not only from looking East at Japan and South Korea but also from looking at some developing countries in Asia," he said.

He was addressing some 500 people, including ministers, parliamentarians, foreign diplomats, senior government officials and corporate leaders at a luncheon hosted by his Lebanese counterpart Rafic Hariri at his office, Grand Serail, here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, asked to share Malaysia's development experiences and the lessons learnt, stressed that peace and stability were essential for economic growth.

For this, he said, a strong government was needed.

"Only a strong government can put into operation good but unpopular policies," he said.

He said there was no standard

recipe applicable to all countries.

"I certainly do not have such a recipe to offer today. I can only talk of Malaysia's experiences; if these give rise to ideas about development in other countries, we will feel honoured and flattered," he added.

Tracing the country's development, including the industrialisation process, technological advancement, social engineering and handling of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, Dr Mahathir said there were "a thousand and one" things governments must do to successfully develop their countries.

"We try in Malaysia and I think the results are quite good," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the country would have done better if not for the financial crisis.

He said Malaysia was now looking for ways to increase trade with other countries to offset the reduction in trade with traditional partners like the United States.

"We see a great potential for increasing our trade with this part of the world and we assure you that our trade will not benefit us alone. We want to buy as well as sell," he added.

He said one important aspect of Malaysia's administration was the need for government ministers to go

on the ground.

This was to ensure government decisions were fully and correctly implemented, he said.

Another thing the government had done was to change the people's mindset.

"Under British rule, Malaysians were made to feel so inferior that they believed they could never be more than farmers and fishermen."

To overcome this, he said, the government adopted the slogan "Malaysia Boleh" to convince the people they could do anything that others did.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia followed closely the technological advancements in the world and encouraged the acquisition of new technologies.

Another aspect of Malaysia's success was its desire to try and live within its means.

"If we seemed to be overspending, it was because people assumed we could not afford the projects we carried out," he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir visited a downtown reconstructed area called Solidere and went to the Parliament House to call on Speaker Nabih Berry.

Later, he flew to Cairo for another working visit.