

PM calls for focus on human capital

STAR 29 OCT 2003

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia should build on its "human capital" to nurture and produce leaders who can be compared against the best in the world, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said there was a continual need for change in the mindset of Malaysians.

He said this would allow Malaysians to be a "more reasonable, modern and progressive society with sharp thinking skills" who can be proud of their achievements and have confidence in their abilities.

"We need to build systems and institutions that encourage learning at all levels and continuously," he said yesterday at the official launch of the International Centre for Leadership in Finance (ICLIF).

He said the bedrock of Vision 2020 was based on having a stream of well-trained people managing key assets of the country.

Dr Mahathir said lifelong learning was becoming increasingly more

important today.

"The old idea that once you are trained for something, then you continue to do the same thing over and over again for years is no longer tenable.

"Your work and skills will have to change with the continuous technological changes over time," he said.

He said financial institutions would be encouraged to provide soft loans to working adults to continue their education, whereas the Employees' Provident Fund was another avenue for Malaysians to finance their education.

Employers, too, would be encouraged to promote lifelong learning and retraining to equip workers with new skills and knowledge, he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke at length on Malaysia's achievements so far and said the country was midway towards Vision 2020.

"We have taken important strides towards it but in these uncertain times, we cannot afford to be complacent and let things roll along.

"We need to look at where we are

today and how we have reached this stage in our development," he said.

He said Malaysia did not blindly adopt the Western model of development but instead found its own path.

"Our attitudes and what we have done in the past, correctly or incorrectly, can serve to guide us in the future," he said.

Dr Mahathir noted that when Malaysia became independent in 1957, it had a population of only five million and the per capita income was US\$300 (RM1,140).

He said Malaysia's population today stood at 25 million and the per capita income was US\$4,000 (RM15,200).

"All this has not happened by accident," he said.

He said Malaysia planned, strategised and implemented market-oriented policies to make it all happen.

"We are pragmatists, doing what is possible and ignoring idealistic dreams," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was always prepared to learn from others and adapt policies to suit its needs.