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Dr M: Embrace life-long learning

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on Malaysians not to rest on their laurels but to embrace life-long learning if they are to thrive in a knowledge-based economy.

Dr Mahathir, speaking at the launch of Bank Negara's International Centre for Leadership in Finance (ICLIF), said life-long learning would sharpen thinking skills and bring about a paradigm shift to make Malaysians "more responsible, modern, progressive, confident and proud of our achievements".

"We need to build systems and institutions that encourage learning at all levels and continuously," he added, noting that life-long learning was essential in the K-economy, which utilised knowledge and skills that constantly needed to be upgraded.

"New skills and expertise will be required to improve employability and productivity. 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 your skills will have to change with the continuous technological changes over time," he said.

With knowledge and continuous learning, Malaysians would know how to adopt good practices from others and adapt them to suit the country's needs.

He said the Government had laid the foundation of Vision 2020 through its own policies, instead of blindly adopting the Western model of development.

"We are bound neither by socialist nor capitalist ideologies. We are pragmatists, doing what is possible and ignoring idealistic dreams. The country's unique path to development was evidenced by the choices it made to transform itself from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial-based one," he said.

"(Since) Malaysia lacked industrial expertise, capital or management skills, or knowledge of the market, we decided to invite foreigners to start manufacturing industries in Malaysia. We were prepared to forego taxes because we wanted to create jobs for our people. We also wanted to learn about manufacturing, to absorb the technology so we could reduce our dependence on foreigners."

Malaysia did all this in contrast to other newly-independent countries, which nationalised their foreign holdings and closed their markets to foreign goods, Dr Mahathir noted.

Outlining some of Malaysia's successes, he said many industries were now Malaysian-owned and managed. The population was now some 25 million and per capita income was almost US\$4,000 (RM15,200), while 82 per cent of exports, worth US\$100 billion (RM380 billion) comprised manufactured goods.

Malaysia had even managed to export local skills and expertise in fields such as civil engineering, used biotechnology to improve yields in palm oil and rubber and developed computer hardware and software for export.

These successes had caused Malaysia to be viewed as a model developing country, Dr Mahathir noted, and called on Malaysians to change their mindset accordingly.

"These achievements require a shift in the mindset of Malaysians towards perseverance and determination, willingness to compete, self-confidence, resilience and readiness to innovate," he said.

He said the Government was promoting life-long learning by increasing Internet penetration into rural areas, opening community colleges and universities, allowing distance learning and funding education.