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Indigenising the diaspora

OVERSEAS Chinese have achieved great success in their adopted countries, such as in acquiring wealth and, in some nations, even political power. But there is sometimes a price to be paid because success also breeds envy, contempt and even fear. This is perhaps the experience of most immigrant races and their descendants all over the world and is not unique to the Chinese. Although many countries with Chinese minorities recognise their contributions, this does not mean that their involvement in nation-building is wholly satisfactory. There is always room for improvement in this important aspect of the Chinese diaspora.

Addressing the Seventh World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention on Monday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on the overseas Chinese to be more visible in the nation-building process and form true partnerships with the locals. They should pay heed and get rid of the stereotype image of the overseas Chinese as being driven by greed and nothing else.

In Malaysia, the old practice of using Bumiputeras as mere fronts in a joint venture has been reduced by resolute government action. There are now more genuine business partnerships between Bumiputeras and Chinese businessmen. This is a healthy trend. If overseas Chinese remain closed to outsiders, unnecessary suspicion and resentment will be generated against the community. This parochialism traditionally exists even among Chinese businessmen themselves.

Until recently, certain businesses among Malaysian Chinese could be identified along clan and dialect interests which jealously guarded their turf. For example, the rubber and hardware trades were dominated by the Hokkien and tin mining and construction by the Cantonese and Hakka. The Hainanese largely owned the coffeeshops. But if overseas Chinese are to make greater strides in future they will have to open up and hire the best talent available. Some of the bigger family-owned private companies in Malaysia should recruit good professionals from among the Bumiputeras and other races to expand their talent pool and accelerate growth. Chinese entrepreneurs should recognise talent from other communities, too.