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`Muslims must strive to master science'

CYBERJAYA, Sat. - Muslims must strive to master science to not only enable the continued survival of the ummah but also strengthen Muslims' faith in Islam, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"You must study science in order to survive, in order to protect ourselves, in order to match with others, not to fight with them but actually to ensure that we are given a chance to survive as the others have survived.

"In order to become a developed country, we have to acquire knowledge in the fields of science, mathematics and technology because such knowledge will contribute towards the strengthening of our faith, strengthening ourselves, our nation and towards the betterment of our society and the world in general."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the opening of Malaysia's first holistic science research and development laboratory - InventQjaya Sdn Bhd (IQJ).

The laboratory, designed to speed up the innovation of a world-class knowledge economy in the country, occupies a state-of-the-art 28,000 sq-metre facility.

IQJ is a joint venture between the Malaysian Government and Reveo Inc, a US-registered company owned by Libyan scientist Dr Sadeg Faris.

Dr Mahathir said the description of science, mathematics and technological studies as secular by certain quarters was unfounded as science had been proven vital to the survival of mankind.

"Actually, science would enable us to better understand the powers of the creator, so Muslims should not worry that science will undermine their faith, religion and their fate.

He said by seeking knowledge in science and technology, Malaysians could achieve progress, improve the quality of life of themselves and others, and become a great nation.

It was with such vision that the Government invested in InventQ-jaya, expecting Malaysians to adopt the culture of science and invention so that the nation need not depend on others for a prolonged period.

"Hopefully, some young Malaysians will become the Einstein of Malaysia in the spirit of Malaysia Boleh," he said, adding that Malaysians should also change their perspective on local inventions.

"We often hesitate at locally-invented or produced products while rushing for foreign inventions. This must be corrected as we are as good as anyone."

Dr Mahathir urged banks, financial institutions and venture capitalists to change their mind-set in evaluating support for inventions.

"They are still unable to evaluate the inventions and new ideas, so they are not quite willing to risk their money, even though they are so-called venture capitalist. Even venture capitalist are very careful about investing (in new inventions) so we don't have that culture yet.

"Our banks lend money on the basis of collateral, sometimes collaterals are worth more than 100 per cent of the money that they lend.

"They have to change their mind and their way of working."

Asked if the Intensification of Research in Priority Areas (IRPA) grant provided by the Environment, Science and Technology Ministry should be extended to inventions and new ideas, Dr Mahathir said it was not a matter of extending it but more on how such undertakings were evaluated.

"We want to know whether or not an idea can take off. That's why we ask for a demonstration but they can't demonstrate without building first. To build, they need money. Without money they cannot demonstrate.

"So, which one? Where do we begin, where do they break the cycle?"