

# Innovation, Branding and Leadership the Way Forward, Says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 7 -- Innovation, branding and leadership are the three vital traits which need to come together for the country to face the ever increasing competitive world, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.



"For me, the three themes of innovation, branding and leadership encapsulate the demands on Malaysia and every developing country that aspires to be successful in these challenging times. The three concepts touch upon the fundamental questions of national advantage, namely what we do, how we are perceived and how consistent we are in reaching our goals," he said in his keynote address at the opening of the two-day Global Leadership Forum here Tuesday.

The event was organized by the Foundation for the Future, an international think-tank, and the **Perdana Leadership Foundation**. Abdullah said the importance of innovation had often been emphasized, especially for nations moving from labor intensive activities to knowledge intensive activities. However without international recognition and trust, product of any kind of innovation would be limited in demand, he said. Abdullah said: "Of course neither innovation nor branding would come about without the leadership to provide the vision as well as momentum.

"Leadership puts a sense of mission behind innovation and sustains the integrity of any brand. That is true for any company and for any country," he said.

The Prime Minister said being a leader in a country like Malaysia was extremely difficult and challenging, but it was also fascinating and tremendously rewarding at the same time. He pointed out that the world today had become much more challenging and that the requirement for survival and prosperity was innovation. He said for many nations like Malaysia, the challenge was in moving up the value chain and making the transition to a high value added economy, one which was based on the intellectual capacity of highly educated and capable people.

"At the heart of innovation is human creativity. Human capital is the only source of innovation and of a country's long term advantage," he said. Abdullah said the question of innovation went beyond education as it involved values, attitudes, mindset and culture.

"The fear of failure, of trying out new things, is a cultural issue. This fear inhibits innovation at all levels, in the classroom, in the workplace, in universities and in government agencies. Part of my mission is to gradually nurture a climate which diminishes fear of failure or fear of criticism and which supports creative thinking. I want a climate where people with new ideas can be heard and where good ideas can receive the necessary resources for further development," he said.

Abdullah also wanted all elements of the national innovation system nurtured and strengthened where innovation would become a way of life. On branding, the Prime Minister said there was a growing realization on the countries that brands could be extremely useful in providing certainty and assurance to the global market. He said brands could also be extremely useful in providing a lens through which the international community could understand a country, and like innovation, brands were a source of growth and value.

"However, this is only true as long as the country really embodies the brand that is espoused. If the way things are done is at odds with the brand as it is being touted, the brand will be significantly devalued," said Prime Minister. Malaysia, Abdullah said needed to get both the external and internal dimensions of branding right where externally the country must be known for the values it truly upheld such as love for peace, stability as well as moderation and progress.

Internally, the nation should undertake the hard work required to truly live up to the aspiration of being branded as a developed nation, said Abdullah. On leadership, he said, while a leader must aspire his or her people to work with him or her, the leader should also understand the human condition, the inherent frailties and preconceptions in his or her people. In the face of this, Abdullah said, developing desired behaviors which are aligned to the aspired brand, becomes a monumental Endeavour, which" can and must be done."

"Leaders are ultimately both steward and servant of their organizations, be it a company or a country and this means that it is their fundamental duty to develop the people, the culture and the reputation of their institution. As steward and servant, they must perform and be accountable for results.

"As steward and servant, they must exhibit and encourage the highest store of values of honesty, integrity, justice, fairness and equity. As steward and servant, they must leave their institution a better place as a result of their leadership," he added.