

PM: Asians must overcome fear of failure

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KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia - Asians must overcome their fear of failure because it inhibits innovation at all levels - from the classroom to the science lab to government agencies, Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Tuesday.

In today's climate, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian economies, which for decades had been the workshops of the world, could no longer rely on their cheap labour and low taxes to attract investors, Abdullah said in a speech to open a two-day global leadership forum. With countries such as India and China offering even cheaper labour, "the requirement for survival and prosperity is innovation," he told the conference, titled "Leadership, Innovation and Branding: The Way Forward."



It will be addressed by political and business leaders who gained success through innovation and were not afraid of failure. Among them are Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop chain of cosmetic shops, Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, Tony Fernandes, the Malaysian-born founder of AirAsia, the region's most successful budget airline, and Abdullah's predecessor, Mahathir Mohamad.

Mahathir is credited with transforming Malaysia from a commodities trading nation to a leading manufacturing hub for electrical and electronics goods, and lately a technological center. Abdullah said the question of innovation - whether it be in technology, science, business, social work or government projects - goes beyond education and involves mindsets and culture, referring to the Asian concept of losing face or the shame associated with doing the wrong thing.

"For example, 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," he said.

"Part of my mission is to gradually nurture a climate which diminishes the fear of failure, or fear of criticism and which supports creative thinking," he said.

"People will only invest in being creative and innovative if there is room and safety for new, even dissenting views," he said. Abdullah said that countries such as Malaysia should strive to be "branded" as innovators, because in this marketing-driven world, brands provide a lens through which international community can understand a country.