

One language, one culture

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MELAKA, Sat. — The question of a national culture based on the culture of the indigenous people of Malaysia should not arise anymore, just as in the case of the national language, and neither should it be turned into a political issue, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We have all agreed that unity and stability should be built and nurtured through one language, that is the national language based on the Malay language, and through one culture, that is the national culture based on the culture of the indigenous people of Malaysia," the Prime Minister said.

"If we truly want a peaceful nation, then language and culture should not be turned into a political issue that can only benefit those who are anti-unity and whose loyalty is questionable," he added.

What should be questioned now are the efforts and responsibilities needed to fulfil the accepted concept of national culture in the interest of harmonious living, he said at the opening of a four-day *Meeting of the Malay World '82* here.

In alluding to calls by certain sectors that culture should not be imposed from outside, but should evolve from within, the Prime Minister said a national culture just like aspects of modern living, needed to be built and developed through planning and specific strategy.

"Cultural planning has now become a normal and accepted subject," he said.

He said even though a culture was a heritage, it was not static.

"It is the ability of a culture to undergo change that gives us the hope to plan and bring changes that are suitable to our present needs."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told the over 250 participants from the five Asean countries, Brunei and Sri Lanka that Malaysia's national cultural policy of assimilating only suitable elements of other cultures was neither new nor mere words.

"The national culture is based on the culture of the indigenous people of this region which for hundreds of years has assimilated elements of for-

eign culture and where Islam was an important influence," he said.

"The only difference was that in the past, cultural growth was not planned until we had absorbed unhelpful and undesirable elements that had prevented us from building a proper national culture to shape a people that was strong and truly loyal to Malaysia."

With cultural planning, he said: "We can then discard values which do not bring us benefits and are contrary to national interest; we can nurture and strengthen good values that had not been common practice before and we can inculcate new values that can help build a strong nationality."

At the same time, he said, the freedom for others to practise their own culture within a specific framework and limitations was guaranteed by the country's constitution.

Identity

Talking about the Malay world which had a rich and outstanding history, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the fall of the Malay world was due to a confrontation with a race that had superior knowledge and technology and that had cheated and manipulated the Malay race and implanted in them the seeds of disunity.

"It happened, because in subtle ways, the for-

eigners managed to control our thoughts until we looked down on ourselves," he said.

"They pushed on us their values and culture until we lost our own identity and instead held high what they had.

"With independence we must now redeem our self-respect as a race of superior character and with the capacity to progress in all fields."

This, he said, should be the thrust of the world view of modern Malays.

He urged the participants, through their writings and creativity, to set in motion a new Malay world that can contribute to progress in every nook and corner where Malays lived.