

Mahathir on positive values and language mastery

When 'foreign is good for the nation

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri — The mastery of foreign languages does not threaten the national aspiration of promoting Bahasa Malaysia.

Speaking at a Gapena (National Writers Association) dinner tonight, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said:

"A good command of foreign languages will contribute towards an enhanced Bahasa Malaysia.

"The Government is strictly implementing the policy on the National Language and strongly encourages its use as a medium of literature.

"But we have to view the overall situation rationally. We have to be careful, lest in our determination to elevate Bahasa Malaysia, our need for foreign languages is ignored."

Dr Mahathir said the development of Bahasa

Malaysia-to its **present** level was achieved **due** to **the presence** of Malaysians who had **mastered** **foreign** languages.

"Without this command (of languages), **the** assimilation of foreign words into Bahasa Malaysia will be **limited** to **the mere** borrowing of **the** sound of words **devoid** of an understanding of what they meant.

"If only **the** sounds of foreign words **were** borrowed but **their** meaning ignored, it is **better** to **create** our own sound of words. To **borrow** without trying to understand will merely confuse us **all**."

He said this was a **result** of **weak** command of foreign languages.

"If we **aspire** to **enrich** Bahasa Malaysia, **every single** educated Malaysian should master at **least** two foreign languages. This does not mean **betraying** the National Language," he said.

The Prime Minister **warned** that although **foreign languages** can still be translated at **present**, he feared that **parochialism** and **excessive** **pride** in **the** National Language may **cut off** **the** **sources** of foreign knowledge.

"We should now **search** for an **acceptable** **balance** between **the** use of Bahasa Malaysia and **the** academic languages of **the** world. It is the duty of those **fluent** in foreign languages to **transfer** **the** vast **foreign** knowledge into Bahasa Malaysia.

"This balanced usage, if presented to **the people** logically should not give rise to doubts and anxiety **among them**."

On **the** literary use of Bahasa Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said **the Government's** **privatisation** concept should also be inculcated in linguistic and creative writing.

Essential

He also urged **the private** sector to help **the** Government in **developing** **the** National Language and national literature.

He said a lot of reading and academic material in **the** National Language was **needed** at present but it could not be **commercially** produced **because** **the** demand was **limited**.

Positive foreign values and languages **were** **essential** in **strengthening** **the** education system and in **the** successful **transfer** of foreign **technology** and knowledge, he added.

The Prime Minister also **gave** away prizes for **the** fifth Esso-Gapens short story competition and Esso-Gapena youth literature contest.