

Govt stands firm on national language

By LESLIE LOPEZ

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad said the Government's stand on the national language should no longer be controversial because it has been very liberal towards other languages in the country.

Opening the day-long National Language Convention in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the people have always been given the freedom to use their own mother tongues.

He said the national language should be accepted by all because it would not change the race of a person.

"By accepting the national language one is identified as a Malaysian," the Prime Minister said.

The convention, organised by the Umno Cultural Bureau in cooperation with Gapena (National Writers Federation), Malay Teachers Association and the Malaysian Translators Association, is aimed at accord- ing greater respect and dignity to Bahasa Malaysia as the na-

tional language.

Dr Mahathir said the conven- tion was of great significance because it was the first time the national language was given a firm political commitment.

He said that national lan- guage is not the original Malay language but rather a modern language capable of develop- ment and meeting new chal- lenges.

"The role of the national lan- guage in the development of the country can't be disputed," he said.

Dr Mahathir said to ensure further development of the na- tional language, Malaysians should try to obtain a better command of other languages such as English, French and Arabic.

Also present at the convention was Umno Youth president An- war Ibrahim. Encik Anwar said the responsibility of ensuring the continued use of Bahasa Malaysia as the country's offi-

cial language is not Umno's alone but the people's responsi- bility as well.

He said Bahasa Malaysia should not be made a subject of controversy by any quarter now because it had been accepted as the national language by the various races in the country even before independence 29 years ago.

The people must go all out to oppose any effort to dispute this agreement, he said.

Encik Anwar, who is also Eu- cation Minister, added that if a political party was behind ef- forts to hamper the continued use of the national language, the people must ensure the party concerned was not voted into power in the coming general election.

He said he regretted that a certain party professed to champion the Islamic cause but attempted to undermine Bahasa Malaysia's position as the na- tional language.