

ETHNIC LANGUAGES CAN BE USED FREELY: PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad assured the people today that the Government will not restrict the use of ethnic languages.

"Just as the Government does not restrict the use of Kelantan and Sarawak dialects, it will not restrict the use of ethnic languages.

"The Government is very liberal. Therefore Bahasa Malaysia should no longer be a subject of controversy," he said when opening a National Language Conven-

tion at the University of Malaya.

He added that the acceptance of the national language by the various communities would not "change their race."

Dr Mahathir also said that in the efforts to uphold Bahasa Malaysia, negative attitudes must not be inculcated among people seeking to learn international languages like English, French and Arabic.

He said that learning foreign languages would enrich knowledge and widen

perception of an environment that is far different from the learner's.

"Certain quarters of Malays should also learn languages like Chinese and Tamil to better understand the culture and psychology of these communities," he added.

He said this could enhance intra-racial understanding and reduce the incidence of actions which hurt communal sensitivities.

Dr Mahathir said the learning of other languages,

apart from enriching knowledge, could provide a new experience in the learning process and sharpen the ability to think.

"It would also increase efficiency in carrying out daily tasks," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said there were certain quarters of people who did not like to use Bahasa Malaysia and added that the national language had developed extensively in the country and its application as a language of knowledge could not be disputed.

He said that if the extensiveness of the language's usage was not satisfactory, one of the reasons would be the reluctance of certain quarters in using it.

He said the growth of the national language had also been hindered by people who ridiculed foreigners who spoke the language and by those who preferred to reply in English.

Dr Mahathir said these attitudes reduced the interest of people to speak in Bahasa Malaysia.

"If the English had

laughed at mistakes made by non-Englishmen speaking the language, English might not have become an international language," he added.

He said the national language was a true Malaysian language as it assimilated the Arabic, Sanskrit, Portuguese, English and Persian languages.

Dr Mahathir said Bahasa Malaysia is a new and modern language capable of facing the challenges of current developments in knowledge.