

PM: LET LITERATURE BE INSPIRED BY PEOPLE

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs.

Literary works should be inspired by the voice of the people and reflect their aspirations so that they will be accepted by the public, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Literature which is the result of feedback between the people and writers will be generally accepted by society."

"Even the most experimental of creative writing is actually the writer's reactions — be it restlessness or disappointment — to society," the Prime Minister said at the launching of two books by Usman Awang at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka here.

The books were a compilation of selected poems and dramas.

However, Dr Mahathir said, literature would be meaningless if writers had no commitment to themselves and to their readers.

At the same time, writers should be aware of the political and social realities, he said.

Dr Mahathir said at one time, nationalists used literature in the struggle for independence just as nationalists in other countries had used literature for the same purpose.

"The difference (in the use of literature) is in the needs of the respective place or region. So, whatever the aspirations of a writer, he cannot reject society," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Usman Awang had changed people's perspective of old literature. He said if anyone classified Usman Awang as a romantic poet, it was only because of his gentle language.

"But behind that softness is a voice of restlessness and sharp criticism," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said old values were important but not all of them were good and had to be followed. There were some values which had to be discarded, he said.

"We must be brave enough to say that a certain old value is wrong and not suitable for the present.

"And in moulding a new

and progressive society, we must accept the principle that we need to reject those values which we feel would be counter-productive or could hinder society's aspirations.

"We should also be bold enough to give new interpretations to old values as has been successfully done by Usman Awang in several of his writings," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that writers should be sensitive to changes and current trends from time to time and should be actively involved in society's activities.

DBP director-general Datuk Haji Hassan Ahmad said selected literary works of Malaysian writers should be made compulsory reading in schools and tertiary institutions.

He said literature was not for a certain group of people but for everyone.

This was because literature portrayed life, its values, its socio-cultural qualities, sentiments and the people's problems which could not be gleaned from science books or other books of knowledge, he said.

"Therefore, our science students, national leaders, politicians, government officers and businessmen should be encouraged to read the nation's literary works because it was one way of knowing about our own race," Datuk Hassan.

He said it was appropriate that Usman Awang's works be compiled into a private collection to record his contribution to the literary world.

He said that Dewan Bahasa was now in the process of producing the literary works of other national writers.

Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on Monday that Dewan Bahasa was the "weakest" book publisher and urged the organisation to rectify its weaknesses.

Datuk Hassan said that once the quality of writing for school and university books improved, Dewan Bahasa would be able to overcome its problems.