

What role of historians should be Linking past to present: Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Historians should not be satisfied with merely recording the past; they should also be interpreters of its relevance to the present, Datuk Seri, Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said there was no doubt that historians were investigators of the past.

"But they need not be mere recorders of the past. Indeed they ought also to be the interpreters of its relevance to the present and the assessors of the achievements through the ages," he said when opening the Sixth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies.

Dr Mahathir said their scholarly interpretations should represent the voices of human progress and vision and be "an important corrective to the superficial instant judgments which are the fashion now".

Such interpretations of age-old values of human mores, ethics and philosophy, he added, would serve not

only as a guide for the future but also as a bulwark against the dangers of a depersonalisation of humanity.

Dr Mahathir also said the field of Tamil studies was indeed wide, involving various disciplines such as linguistics, literature, history, archaeology, anthropology, sociology and science.

Academic activities

The fact that the conference would discuss the use of the Tamil language in computers and word processors clearly indicated the expansion of Tamil studies to include new horizons in keeping with modern needs.

The Prime Minister said the Malaysian Government permitted the use and study of other languages, besides Bahasa Malaysia.

The fact that the conference was held twice in Malaysia, the last one being 21 years ago, clearly underlined this reality, he added.

Dr Mahathir also said the idea of holding regular meetings of scholars for the purpose of attaining higher standards in the use of language and in the building up of a good literary heritage was not new to the Tamil tradition.

Such an idea, he added, had been the basis of the academic activities of the *Sangam* or the academy of learned Tamil poets.

Dr Mahathir noted that the Tamil literature shared antiquity with other ancient and classical literatures of the world but at the same time continued to flourish as a vigorous medium of speech and writing.

"This is something that cannot be said of some of the ancient languages."

About 2,500 scholars and language experts from 22 countries, including Australia, France, Germany, Japan, Sri Lanka, India and Britain, are attending the five-day conference.