

Push for its wider use: Mahathir For the love of Bahasa

By **KALIMULLAH HASSAN**

HUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — **Datuk Seri** Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for a review of laws on the use of Bahasa Malaysia to encourage its wider use and achieve the aims of the national language policy.

However, he said, this should be done with consideration for other languages as agreed when independence was achieved.

Launching the *Gerukan Cintailah Bahasa Kita* (Love Our Language Movement), Dr Mahathir said there should also be a study on the success rate and problems encountered with programmes designed to encourage Bahasa Malaysia's growth.

"There should also be a study on the problems faced in implementing the use of the language in the private sector, legal circles and the judiciary, engineering, medicine and trade and industry."

He said that while the use of Bahasa Malaysia had widened, there were still many sectors which preferred to use English.

"We do not deny the importance of English in administrative and business matters, especially for large companies with international dealings.

Change attitude

"It would be unfair and unreasonable if we force large companies to use Bahasa Malaysia when communicating with companies in America, the Arab countries, Japan, India or China.

"But we question the tendency (of some sectors) to use English at the expense of Bahasa Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir singled out shopping centres as one of the biggest culprits.

He said there were still signboards which either did not use Bahasa Malaysia or used it wrongly.

"There are no restrictions on the use of other languages, but the national language should be given priority," he said.

"I believe that such actions prevail because of lack of confidence in the national language. We should do away with such attitudes because there are no defects in our language as a means of communication."

He said Malaysians should love the National Language and use it for communication at all levels.

"We have to change our attitude. We must not regard Bahasa Malaysia as a language only for correspondence with the Government, but accept it as a symbol of national prestige and as a means of communication between various races."

He said the Government had carefully planned the development of the national language with consideration for other languages and the role of English as Malaysia's second language.

"Now, after 30 years, we should no longer question the position of Bahasa Malaysia.

"We should also not question that of the Chinese and Tamil languages. This is provided for by law and we have never prevented people from studying other languages."

"In developing countries, this is a unique practice. Even in developed and liberal countries, such a practice is seldom adopted."

He said the language laws were very clear and language should never become a racial issue affecting harmony and stability.

He said Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, voluntary organisations and literary and linguistic societies should play a bigger role in promoting the language.

Bigger role

The Malays, too, have an important role to play.

"It has become a habit with us that when we speak to non-Malay-speaking friends, we put on an Indian or Chinese accent," he said.

"This pollution will not allow standard Bahasa Malaysia to develop."

He also chided comedians who performed sketches with ethnic undertones.

"It is easy to laugh and make fun of the accents of other races. But this just shows up the inadequacies of such comedians. A good comedian does not have to use other people's weaknesses . . . as an attraction."

He noted that non-Malays had become good Bahasa Malaysia speakers, with some becoming announcers on television and radio.

"I believe that with one more generation, the command of the national language among non-Malays will reach its optimum."

However, he warned that Malaysians could not afford to just sit back and hope for the language to develop.

"If we do that, it is possible that the language will deteriorate."

About 2,500 people, including Cabinet Ministers, diplomats and corporate leaders, attended the launch of the language movement.