

Good grasp of BM, English vital: Dr M

PENANG, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today stressed the need for a good command of Bahasa Malaysia and English though "mastering one should not be at the expense of the other".

The Prime Minister said being proficient in one language did not mean that the standard of the other should decline.

A good command of the two languages would not affect the spirit to struggle for the sovereignty of the national language "as well as to have one language as a communication link between all the races".

He noted the importance in mastering a second language in the modern age as the learned must be proficient in more than one language — otherwise, translations cannot be made, communication with foreign countries would be rendered impossible and treaties cannot be ratified.

"But it is also important to note that mastering a second, third or subsequent number of languages should not lessen our nationalistic spirit and our struggle to give the national language its rightful place."

The Prime Minister said this when he opened the 11th biennial delegates' conference of the Malay Teachers' Union of West Malaysia at Universiti Sains Malaysia here.

He also reminded teachers not to forget their role and responsibility in promoting the national language as it is a

binding force for the people of the country.

He said the choice of English as the country's second language was not made out of sentiment or colonial influence.

"We cannot deny that English is most widely used in the world today. Therefore we have to master the language to communicate. And at the same time, we can learn a third, fourth and subsequent languages to broaden our knowledge."

Dr Mahathir also highlighted the role of teachers in shaping the destiny of the country and called for the proper teaching of civics in schools.

Civics

A country with people who are lazy, not trustworthy, not dedicated, confrontational, deceitful and greedy will not be as successful as one with people with the right values.

"The best time to instil these values in our people is when they are young. And apart from parents, it is the teachers who play a big part in instilling these values.

"Civics should be emphasised in schools — not only in the classrooms but also informally outside."

As for indiscipline, Dr Mahathir said there was no fixed way to check it but if discipline was inculcated early among pupils the problem could be lessened.

Pupils, he said, should also

be taught the virtues of being thrifty.

"People who manage their finances well can be rich and the country will benefit from rich citizens. But those who spend lavishly will be a burden to the country and ruin its economy."

About 600 delegates are attending the two-day conference being held simultaneously with the union's co-operative annual meeting.

Dr Mahathir also presented the union's top awards (*Tokoh KGMMB*) to three retired teachers — Haji Mohamed Nor Sidek of Penang, Haji Abdul Razak Mohamad Noor of Kedah and Johore's Haji Jaafar Suradi.

Also present was Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Finance Minister Senator Farid Ariffin and USM Vice-Chancellor Datuk Haji Musa Mohamed