

PM: English as vital as Bahasa

PENANG, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that English is as important as Bahasa Malaysia.

He said a good command of at least two languages was important, and that was why the country's education system fixed English as a second compulsory language, since it is the most widely used language in the world.

However, added Dr Mahathir, mastering English did not mean that the standard of Bahasa Malaysia should decline.

"Being proficient in English will also not reduce our love for our mother-tongue

or erode our national spirit.

"We did not make English a second compulsory language for our students out of sentiment or due to the colonial influence but because it is a means of communication," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the opening of the Peninsular Malaysia Malay Teachers Union's (KGMMB) biennial delegates conference at Universiti Sains Malaysia here.

Also present was Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

On indiscipline, the Prime Minister said it was a problem in schools today.

Discipline, he said, was

not a natural occurrence among young children and had to be learnt through examples and role models such as teachers and parents.

"If a number of students in a class have no discipline, then the others would soon be influenced and this indiscipline could spread to the whole school," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was no one sure method of instilling discipline in children, but if they were taught in the early stages, the cases of indiscipline would be reduced.

He called on teachers to not only pass on knowledge to their students but to also

help instil discipline and proper values in them.

"We teach civics in our schools but many mistakenly consider this subject to be unimportant," he said.

"This aspect of education must be taken more seriously if the country is to have good and useful citizens."

Dr Mahathir also urged parent-teacher associations in rural schools to make an effort to set up libraries in these schools.

He said rural students did not have the same opportunities to read as their urban counterparts because of the lack of libraries.