

PM: IT'S WORRYING

Pass in English may be compulsory for SPM

By Zulkifli Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Government will consider making a pass in English compulsory in the SPM examination if the standard of the language among students continues to fall, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"I am very worried. "I feel that we will lose out if we do not strive to master the language while at the same time continue to improve our command of Bahasa Malaysia," the Prime Minister said.

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"Furthermore, English is recognised as an international language," he told reporters after launching corporate-style Zakat

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collection operations at the Zakat Collection Centre at the Sulaiman Building here.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the Education Ministry, parents and teachers would help to improve the standard of the language among students.

Asked whether the decline had resulted from weaknesses of the ministry or other reasons such as lack of English language teachers and dissatisfaction among teachers over their salary, Dr

Mahathir said:

"All of these had contributed to it. I cannot put extra weight on any particular factor."

He said that the proposal to make a pass in English compulsory had been suggested many times in the past but the Government had not come to a decision on it.

"But if the situation worsens, we may be forced to re-study the proposal and make a pass in English compulsory," he said.

Asked whether there was any immediate measure that would be taken to halt the decline in student proficiency in the language, Dr Mahathir said that he would leave it to the ministry.

Among those calling on the Government to make a pass in English compulsory is the National Union of the Teaching Profession.

However, NUTP secretary-general N. Siva Subramaniam has said that teachers should not be blamed for the decline in the standard of English among students.

He said that this was because the students themselves did not seem to take the subject seriously since they were not required to pass.

Passes in the 1990 SPM English paper showed a 1.6 per cent drop while passes in the SPM (V) English paper fell by eight per cent.