

PM: Government may allow foreign universities to open local branches

Increasing chances for higher education

By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The Government is considering allowing foreign universities to establish their branches here if their curriculum could be adjusted to suit the national education policy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This would help increase higher education opportunities for local students, the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said this possibility was being considered on top of present arrangements of allowing first- and second-year degree courses offered by foreign universities to be taught here through the various inter-university co-operation programmes.

This has helped save the country valuable foreign exchange while easing some of the urgent needs in higher education facilities, Dr Mahathir said when opening the *British Education 1991* exhibition at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

He added that the shortage of local institutions of higher learning was not intentional but due to the difficulty in getting qualified teaching staff and the high cost of setting up more of these institutions.

About 350 representatives from various universities, polytechnics and colleges in Britain are taking part in the four-day education fair, which began today. The fair provides parents and students a closer look at the education opportunities available in Britain.

Also present at the open-

ing ceremony were Education Minister Datuk Dr Sulaiman Haji Daud, British High Commissioner Sir Nicholas Spreckley and the director of the British Council in Malaysia, Dr Gareth Howell.

Malaysia spends more than \$1 billion annually on foreign education.

The Prime Minister said a high value was accorded to university degrees. He said: "The general feeling is that those with degrees can do everything. They are often seen as administrators or managers.

"This is not always correct because graduates cannot claim to be truly qualified unless they have acquired the necessary experience," he said.

The Prime Minister said that it was time that recognition given to degrees and their holders be re-evaluated when determining posts, status and salaries.

Dr Mahathir also spoke at length on the need for everyone to master more than one language. While a good command of the mother tongue was important, it was equally important for Malaysians to master other languages, particularly English, an accepted language in international dealings, he said.

This is shown in international agreements and treaties. Some countries whose national language is not English sign treaties with others in English, Dr Mahathir said, adding that the people should understand the Government's policy regarding foreign languages, particularly English.

He said the people should

be serious in mastering a second language. Those who treat attempts to master a second language lightly should not be regarded as the people's champion or nationalists.

"The national language has become increasingly developed because of our open attitude regarding other languages. Those who can help enrich the national language are the deserving choices for the people's champion," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said: "Education is a vital factor in our efforts to make Malaysia a developed country by the year 2020. To achieve this, our knowledge must be on par with that of developed countries.

"It will not be possible for the country to be a developed nation if the people are not highly educated or have little knowledge of the rapid development that is taking place.

"We will not lose anything by mastering the English language, as well as our own, since English holds the key to many forms of old and modern knowledge," he added.

Later, when speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir said that it was not immediately possible for the Government to make it compulsory for students to pass the English language in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia.

"This is because students in the rural areas must be given the opportunity to study English in a more conducive manner as that enjoyed by students in the urban areas," he said.