

'Give economic value to national language' call

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on Malaysians to give economic value to the national language to stimulate interest among more people to master it.

The Prime Minister said the knowledge of the language would benefit the people, irrespective of race.

Opening the 40th MCA annual general assembly here today, Dr Mahathir said he was happy to find that more non-Malays could speak the national language.

Referring to numerous rounds of applause by the 1,940 MCA delegates to the welcoming speech delivered fluently in Bahasa Malaysia by their president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Dr Mahathir said 10 years ago, they might not have understood the message and responded to it.

"But now, many speak the language," he said, adding that this had been

achieved although the Government did not force it on them.

He said that on his recent visit to China, he was impressed with the ability of his officials to converse proficiently in Mandarin with the Chinese there.

"This is certainly encouraging as it helps to facilitate communication and foster our relationship" he said, adding that he hoped the trend of learning the languages of one another would continue.

Speaking to reporters later, he said mastering the national language would not affect the mother tongues of other races.

"What is important is that we have a common language," he said.

He said that while mastering the national language, the people should also ensure greater command of the English language to improve their abilities in the various fields.

On the MCA's Langkawi Project, Dr Mahathir said the Cabinet had agreed to give financial support so that the command of the national language among the Chinese and Indians in the rural areas could be improved under the project.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the stock market. He said investors in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange should not base their investments purely on speculation as they might end up losing money.

He said they needed to be educated on the functions of the stock market but noted that in the initial learning process, some of them would "have their fingers burnt".

"But they will learn ... some the hard way," he said.

Asked whether the Government would impose more rulings to regulate the stock business, Dr Mahathir said: "No matter how much we try to explain and how many regulations we put in, there will always be somebody who will try to make use of the opportunities. We can't help it."

Asked about the manipulation of share prices, he said he did not know how serious it was, but gave the assurance that the Government and the Securities Commission would look into it.

On the guilty plea by former Bumiputra Malaysia Finance Ltd (BMF)'s chairman Lorrain Osman at the High Court in Hong Kong yesterday to a charge of defrauding the BMF of US\$292 million (RM756 million), Dr Mahathir said he believed there would be people who would want to bring up the matter again.

The Prime Minister felt

that there were certain people who were free from the offences they had committed while in office.

"Let the court decide," he said.

Replying to a question from a foreign journalist on what the Western economists could learn from the Asean region, he said one of the things was the need to work hard and be productive.

"People must work. You can't make money without working. This idea that you can raise income without producing anything is all wrong. Here, we believe in working and being productive. If you are not productive, you should not earn more," he said.

To ensure healthy economic development, there must also be political stability, without which "there is no way the economic system can work".

Dr Mahathir said towards this end, either the people must discipline themselves or the Government would discipline them.

"Of course if the people can discipline themselves, it is very good, but if the people cannot discipline themselves or cannot understand how to limit the freedom they have in a democratic society, the Government must step in," he said.

Asked to comment on a welfare state, Dr Mahathir said some countries had "gone overboard" so much so they implemented it irrespective of whether it gave the people a good life or not, so long as they did something interpreted as being generous.

"The fact that the recipients are actually suffering does not seem to affect their thinking," he said.