

Dr M: English vital to stimulate growth

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SINTOK, Fri. — The Government is exploring ways to improve the teaching of English in universities as this is essential in stimulating the nation's growth, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the Government wanted the people to be proficient in English in every important aspect such as delivering speeches, conducting negotiations, preparing drafts of agreements and in routine business communication.

The Prime Minister said: "If they do not reach that level of proficiency, especially in international business, our trading will be confined to domestic transactions.

"These restrictions will be a disadvantage to us. If we believe that besides preserving the nation we should develop the country, then a suitable approach has to be worked out."

He said this to reporters after a closed-door meeting with staff of Universiti Utara Malaysia at its campus here.

He added that the Government realised the importance of English as a second language to help stimulate the nation's growth.

Asked whether there was room for improvement in the teaching of English, the Prime Minister said the teaching of the language had yet to reach the desired level, especially in international communication.

"If we want to be good managers, we have to master English except for those whose dealings do not require them to be proficient in the language. This is regardless of whether they are in the private or public sector," he added.

Asked whether the Government would allow the setting up of private universities to encourage more people to pursue higher education, Dr Mahathir said the Government hoped to have more universities.

"But private universities will still face the existing

problem of the shortage of teaching staff.

"Only recruitment of foreign teaching staff will resolve the problem, but they are not proficient in the national language whereas our University and University College Act states that the medium of instruction shall be in the national language," he added.

He added that this restriction had hampered the development of teaching at university level.

Dr Mahathir said an approach had to be formulated to improve proficiency in English while at the same time upholding the dignity of the national language to achieve the nation's vision of attaining development.

He said at present the Government had to spend funds to send students abroad to study English and several other languages.

"We could save on foreign exchange if they obtain this proficiency locally," he added.

On the Opposition's attempt to gain political mileage from education issues, Dr Mahathir said: "We must

ignore the Opposition's views.

"They are not responsible for the development of the nation, they are merely looking for political mileage.

"Our thoughts should be focused on the future of the nation, whether we want to be a respected developed country or otherwise. These are our choices," he said.

On the meeting with the UUM staff, Dr Mahathir also said he had stressed to them the importance of management efficiency and work ethics.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir was welcomed by Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff, UUM council chairman Tan Sri Mohd Sheriff Kassim and Vice-Chancellor Datuk Dr Shamsuddin Kassim.

After the meeting with the staff, the Prime Minister visited an exhibition on the university's 10th anniversary and signed the visitor's book.

The Prime Minister performed Friday prayers at Masjid Changkat Setul in Changloon after the visit to the university.