

Uphold cultural identity, urges Dr Mahathir

By K.P. Waran and James Ritchie

KUCHING, Mon. — The younger generation must perpetuate Malaysia's varied culture and traditions to ensure the nation's identity is not lost in this modern era of overwhelming Western influence, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said efforts must be taken to combine the different cultural practices to produce a truly Malaysian culture everyone could be proud of.

Launching the national-level *Rakan Seni Budaya* programme at the State Stadium here, he said there is a need to appreciate old traditions and practices and ensure that they are not forgotten.

"Young Malaysians must take on the responsibility to learn about the cultures of the other races in a bid to

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understand each other better and thus promote peace, harmony and unity in the country," he told students, *Rakan Muda* participants and invited guests at the packed stadium.

Earlier the *Rakan Muda* participants put up a colourful show depicting the various cultural dances and music found in Malaysia. The Sarawak Symphony Orchestra choir also performed a repertoire of national songs.

Dr Mahathir said it was heartening to see the participants wearing the traditional outfits of other races and performing dances.

"This is an indication of the unity among the people and that we are willing to learn and adapt to each other's cultures," he said.

He said despite the heavy rain at the end of the performance, the tenacity and commitment of the participants in braving the downpour and ensuring the ceremony went on showed Malaysia's younger generation had the resilience to take on new challenges.

He said as Malaysia marched towards an industrialised era in the year 2020, youngsters who would be the leaders of tomorrow needed to become more knowledgeable and proficient in science and technology to play a more important role in the nation's development.

Earlier, Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud said the nation needed a progressive generation equipped to face the future with courage.

Youth and Sports Minister Abdul Ghani Othman said *Rakan Muda* would become a platform for unity among all the races.