

Not disloyal to learn English

Emphasis is on mastering BM, English

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istic, they are not supporting the Bahasa," he said.

The prime minister said every time the government emphasises the learning and mastery of English, there are language nationalists who believe that to be a nationalist, one should speak only Malay.

Mahathir said a nationalist is someone who has mastered all the knowledge and skills, and is capable of contesting against the rest of the world. "That is the true nationalist."

When asked whether the lack of English content in the national education system is due to the switch to Bahasa Malaysia in schools, he said that is not the case.

"When we switched to Bahasa Malaysia, we emphasised the importance of the English language right from

the word go, way back in the 60s, when the English schools were changed to national schools.

"We emphasised the need to master two languages - Bahasa Malaysia and English," he said.

Asked on the reality that at the school level, the government is producing teachers who are inherently poor in English, he said the government will either have to get teachers from elsewhere or re-train them in English.

On whether the government has the political will to improve the command of English among the Malays, he said: "Political will we have. But we will meet with a lot of (objections) from language nationalists who just want people to speak Malay and have no other knowledge."

Asked if the government is going to ignore them, he said: "You have to ignore

them because the future of our country is at a stick-end."

Mahathir acknowledged that having the ability to speak and explain things in English has served him well during his meetings with world leaders and at world forums.

"That is why I feel that mastering English is very important because we have to deal increasingly with other countries. We can't go there and speak our own language because nobody is going to learn it in order to understand us.

"We can speak to perhaps one or two people, but the world is not going to learn Malay in order to understand the Malays," he added.

During the hour-long interview, Mahathir answered wide-ranging questions covering politics and the economy, especially the k-

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PM: True nationalist

is someone who
masters all skills

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs: The notion that learning and mastering English makes a person less Malaysian is not true, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said some people have the wrong impression that to learn English is to be disloyal and to be unpatriotic.

"They think that just being able to speak Malay makes you a nationalist and that is wrong," he told Bernama in an interview when asked on the poor standard of English among many Malaysians, especially the Malays.

The standard of education, particularly the teaching of English in public schools and universities is reportedly not good enough to sustain and prepare the country for the future, especially for the k-economy.

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Mahathir, speaking in Putrajaya on Tuesday, said it is unfortunate that some people feel that the English language should be neglected entirely if one is to be called a nationalist.

He said they feel that if person is a Malay nationalist, he or she should learn only the Malay language.

"The unfortunate thing is that these people are English-speaking. But then, the Malay students themselves think that if they learn English, they are not being national-

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