

# 'Students risk being left behind in Internet age'

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## PM: Don't be overly dependent on BM materials

**From Syed Nadzri in Osaka**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysian students to stop being overly dependent on Bahasa Malaysia reference materials in higher education because they risk being left behind, especially in this Internet-age.

He said there were far too many constraints in producing enough reference books in the national language, especially on technical subjects and if students were to wait for such books to come out it would be too late.

"In this Internet-age, we can learn just about anything. But do we have to wait for Bahasa Malaysia reference books before we start learning?"

Dr Mahathir said this in response to a question posed to him at a dialogue with Malaysian students in Osaka yesterday.

The dialogue, attended by more than 100 students mainly studying in Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe, was part of the Prime Minister's itinerary in his four-day visit to Osaka.

The question, which came from a student studying at Osaka University, concerned the lack of reference materials in the national language and what the Government was doing about it.

Dr Mahathir, saying it was a big problem, outlined what it takes in terms of resources to translate such books:— an expert in the field, someone who is proficient in the original language of the book and someone who is proficient in Bahasa Malaysia.

"If we look at our country, we

don't have that many people who could fit into these categories. For instance, if we are to translate a book on engineering, we need an engineer to help in the translation.

"Is the engineer willing to forego his primary role and salary and turn translator? That is why reference materials on technical subjects in Bahasa Malaysia are lacking. But do we have to wait for Bahasa Malaysia books before we start learning? We may not learn anything at all if we do," he said.

The Prime Minister said he was not trying to downplay the importance of the national language in making this point, but rather it was through a deep and effective learning process, in whatever language, that could turn the Malaysian race into a force.

Most of the other questions posed during the dialogue touched on concerns by the students about the employment prospects after they graduate, contending that most employers prefer to hire graduates from the United Kingdom or the United States.

Dr Mahathir said it was not true that students who returned to Malaysia from the UK or the US were better. Some, he added, were also not proficient in English as they only mixed with fellow Malaysian students on campus, conversing in Bahasa Malaysia.

The dialogue was preceded by a speech by the Prime Minister who reminded the students that they had a mission to accomplish by studying abroad. One, he said, was to seek fame and fortune for oneself. The other was to use this

knowledge for the good of the country.

But he said knowledge per se was not good enough — the students should learn and acquire from the Japanese their work culture, managerial skills and discipline.

He said the Malaysian Government allocated 20 per cent of its annual budget towards education — something "which no other country in the world does".

Earlier, the Prime Minister visited the Sharp Liquid Crystal Plant in Tenri, about one hour by road from downtown Osaka and then went to the Osaka Electro-Communication College after lunch.

Malaysians may be all too familiar with Sharp electrical products and this plant is one which manufactures appliances using liquid crystal displays (LCDs), the latest craze in electronics technology.

LCD television sets and computer terminals — those flat screen crystal clear laptop-thin appliances that are slowly coming into the Malaysian market — are among products being developed here. Being 21st Century products, they come with 21st Century price tags too.

Dr Mahathir spent about two hours at the factory, visiting its various facilities accompanied by Sharp Corporation president Katsuhiko Machida. The rest of the afternoon was spent mostly at the Osaka Electro-Communication College, a centre engaged in education and research related to electronics engineering and information science.

Here he was briefed by the college chairman of the board of directors Kuniya Fukuda. He also observed an IT-class in session.