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Time we realised importance of mastering English

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LET us admit that English is an important medium of communication in this space age and it is a language of people all over the world especially at the international level.

In this technological age, it is of paramount importance to master English and also to have an adequate command of a second language. Learning English does not make a person less of a nationalist or patriot.

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were English educated and they both fought for the independence of India. Many Asian leaders, including our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, are also well versed in English.

We cannot ignore the importance of English if we want progress and prosperity in the field of technical advancements. English is a very important tool for acquiring knowledge in this fast changing world.

Learning English should start early. Parents should encourage children to study English and continue their studies at tertiary level. At the same time they must learn Bahasa Malaysia which is the official language of Malaysia.

No universities in Europe or America would admit students without a good command of English. Even in India and Singapore, students would find it difficult to enter university without proper knowledge of the English language.

We have enough qualified English teachers and if selected teachers are given the opportunity to acquire additional knowledge to study English at British universities on scholarships, it would be most beneficial in improving the language skills of the coming generation.

Foreign English teachers are not the answer as they would have to leave the country upon expiry of their contracts.

Dr Mahathir in a question and answer session (NST, Dec 29) said: "I must admit the ability to speak and explain things in English has served me very well. I feel mastery of English is very important because of our country's increased foreign relations with other countries and to enable us to communicate with foreigners, whether in Malaysia or overseas. We cannot go to other countries and speak our own language because no foreigner is going to learn our language in order to understand us. We therefore have to emphasise the need to master two languages - Bahasa Malaysia and English."

I think the Prime Minister's views and advice on the English language should be well received by every Malaysian for a progressive Malaysia.