

PM: It's vital to master English

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Language essential for engineering and science fields

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in Washington DC**

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MALAYSIAN students have been urged to master English which is necessary for communication and essential to keep abreast of developments in the technical fields such as engineering and science.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that with Bahasa Melayu, Malaysians had found that people were unable to interact with foreigners in a way that was productive.

Addressing Malaysian students from around the United States at the embassy here, Dr Mahathir said: "Everyone now must study English not just as a language of communication but in order to master the language.

"It will be impossible to translate all the latest English texts into Bahasa Melayu and anyone who knows the language can have immediate access to the latest in Engineering and Science."

Dr Mahathir told the some 180

Malaysian students: "We are going to step up the study of English. The focus is on assisting students to master English and build a strong foundation in the language. English is important for the internet and for Mathematics and Science."

The Umno Supreme Council recently called for Mathematics and Science to be taught in English in addition to a new subject, contemporary English Literature.

The Prime Minister, who was on a working visit to Washington at the invitation of US President George W. Bush, told the students: "Imagine the disaster for the country if you agree to something which you (later) find is damaging to your country.

"English is widely used in trade and international dealings. Agreements are often in English and if we do not have a good command of the language, we might agree to clauses which are actually against our interests."

While stressing the importance of mastering English, Dr Mahathir said it did not mean that Malaysians should forget Bahasa Melayu

or any other language.

"But it is necessary for you to master the English language and master it properly."

The Prime Minister advised students abroad to stay away from misguided militant or extremist groups whose main goal was to overthrow the Government through violent means.

"I don't understand why they want to use arms when they can use elections to choose the Government of their choice."

He told the students about the need to be focused on their goals.

The goal for the nation, he said, was embodied in Vision 2020. There will be challenges along the way but if Malaysians love their country, they will do things to benefit the country and future generations.

He reminded them of the "*Malaysia Boleh*" concept, citing examples of Malaysians who had scaled Mount Everest, sailed solo around the world and gone to Antarctica.

Another Malaysian is attempting to swim across the English Channel.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir opened the new Chancery of the Malaysian

Embassy at No 3516, International Court.

The building, completed in February, is a blend of Malay and colonial British architecture, a style known as Anglo-Straits.

Dr Mahathir said the task of the embassy and its staff included immediately detecting "incipient changes in perceptions and opinions so as to be able to correct them early."

Since Washington is the seat of the most powerful Government, it is important for Malaysia to be able to gauge what effect media reports have on the attitudes or perceptions of the decision-makers in Washington.

"This places a great responsibility on the embassy and its staff to gather information for our Government and to advise us on what should be the appropriate action or reaction on our part," he said.

Dr Mahathir left for Memphis, Tennessee, yesterday, for a private visit en route to Kuala Lumpur.

He was seen off at Andrew's Air Force base here by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar

and Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Fuzi Abdul Razak.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in a message at the opening ceremony of the Chancery, said the building will embody the mission of the embassy and the friendship between the American and Malaysian people.

Powell said the Chancery symbolised the vigour of bilateral ties and the forward-looking vision of both countries at the beginning of a new century and millennium.

During the three-day visit he held discussions with Bush at the Oval office on bilateral issues, terrorism and the Middle East.

Matters of bilateral, regional and international interests were also discussed with other leaders including US Vice-President Richard Cheney, National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice, US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neil, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Federal Reserve Board Chairman, Alan Greenspan.