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Aim must be international recognition, varsities told

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysian universities should work towards international recognition like Oxbridge in Britain, Harvard and Yale in the United States and Keio and Waseda in Japan.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in suggesting that our varsities be made "centres of excellence," said they should be known as institutions of repute.

The Prime Minister said Malaysian universities were currently not well known worldwide.

"I hope our universities will work towards achieving high research and knowledge standards so that some of them will be known worldwide as centres of excellence," he said, adding that graduates and staff of these universities would be respected around the world.

Speaking at the launch of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman or Utar today, Dr Mahathir said universities should not just be "certificate mills".

"The time has come for us to create for ourselves the most suitable ideology for Malaysia, and the management of our country.

"We are also capable of coming up with management and nation-building methods not just for our country but also for others."

Dr Mahathir said it was time that Malaysians questioned the Western way of thinking with those who challenged it considered heretics and "political apostates".

"If we study Western political ideologies and thinking, we will see that they have always created and practised ideologies that they themselves admit to be wrong in the end.

"We should not follow them, trust or practise their system, and only dare drop it (the system) when they themselves drop it."

Among the systems which were subsequently discarded were feudalism, communism and socialism, he said.

"What is clear is that Western systems and ideologies are not infallible. Therefore, we need to question slogans like liberal democracy, globalisation, free market and others so that we can determine whether these ideas will also be deemed unsuitable by the West one day and dropped to be replaced by other ideas."

The Prime Minister said Malaysians should try to rely less on Western thinking and "come up with our own".

He was confident that Malaysians were not so weak to the extent that they could not come up with their own ideas, based on the country's multi-racial uniqueness and experience.

In order that Malaysian universities achieve international recognition, Dr Mahathir said university students and staff must be on the "cutting edge" in specific fields and hold discourses in these areas with experts from other countries.

"In order to carry this out effectively, we need to master the international language, which, at the moment, is English.

"If we want to hold intellectual discourses with experts abroad, mastery and proficiency in English is important."

The Prime Minister said learning other languages would not affect the identity of the different races.

"Speaking in another language, even adopting the name of another race will not change our race or identity."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that at one time, the Government did not allow

the establishment of private higher educational institutions.

"Now the Government has liberalised higher education and allowed private operators to set up universities. This liberalisation has brought with it many problems.

"If not controlled, sub-standard educational institutions will claim they are universities."

He said in many countries, there were hundreds of universities but many were merely "certificate mills".

"Not only will many be cheated but these certificate mills will tarnish the name of our country," he said, adding that the Government would continue to monitor higher educational institutions in the country.

Dr Mahathir said the National Accreditation Board was established to ensure Malaysian universities adhered to minimum standards. "However, we cannot be satisfied with just minimum standards," he said.