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Master English to progress, Dr Mahathir advises Malays

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PERMATANG PAUH, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the mastery of knowledge - especially the English language - by the Malays will bring the race on par with other races in the country.

Pointing to the fact that the Malays had not progressed as a race when compared to other communities, notably the Chinese, he said being proficient in English did not mean they would be any less Malay.

"After studying in a Malay school for two years, the rest of my education was in English and just because I was schooled in that medium, I am not an English man.

"I am Malay... semangat saya Melayu (I have the Malay spirit) and that is why Umno chose me," he told a crowd of 20,000 at a meet-the-people session in the grounds of the Tuanku Bainun Teachers' College in Permatang Pauh.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and State Barisan Nasional component party leaders and members.

Dr Mahathir said his ability to master English had enabled him to communicate directly and effectively with world leaders and other foreigners.

"At least when foreigners belittle us, we are able to respond in a language they understand," he said.

Using the Palestinian issue as an example, Dr Mahathir said he was able to tell US President George W. Bush: "You are very oppressive. Why do you oppress the Palestinian people, why are you unjust?"

The Prime Minister said in a knowledge-based sector, the Malays, compared to other races in the country, are found to be shallow and there was a need for them to be knowledgeable, especially in Science and Technology.

"The reason we need to use English is because the field of Science and Technology is rapidly developing and there are far too much material on the subjects in English to be translated into the national language," he said, adding that it took at least two years to translate a 200-page Science book written in English.

Stressing the need for Malaysians to remain united in the face of the colonising forces of globalisation, Dr Mahathir said the country risked foregoing the independence it gained 45 years ago if petty differences among the people could not be resolved.

"The people must learn to settle any differences they have and not always depend on our leaders. We cannot allow ourselves to be colonised again and risk waiting another 450 years or longer to remove the shackles of colonialism," he added.

Dr Mahathir also touched on his confidence in handing over the reins as Prime Minister to Abdullah and the need for the people to vote in a government which could administer the country efficiently.

The Prime Minister, who was welcomed with traditional dances, two garlands of white daisies and red carnations and a crowd jostling to shake his hand, expressed delight over the presence of many children in the crowd.