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Honorary degree for Dr Mahathir

By Sulok Tawie

UNIVERSITI Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) was among several universities to confer an honorary degree on former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad this year.

On Oct 1, it bestowed an Honorary Doctorate in Development Studies on Dr Mahathir at a special convocation in appreciation of his contributions to the country's development during his 22 years as Prime Minister. In his acceptance speech, Dr Mahathir said local institutes of higher learning should not be too eager to give out degrees to avoid being derogatorily dubbed degree factories.

He said that although Malaysia was proud of the increasing number of universities, steps must be taken to ensure that they did not easily issue degrees without setting quality standards and without considering the country's needs.

"We must remember that there are universities in developed countries which sell degrees," he said. He received the honorary doctorate from Sarawak Yang Di-pertua Negeri, Tun Abang Muhamad Salahuddin Abang Barieng, who is Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Chancellor.

Present were his wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Chief Minister, Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud (who is Unimas Pro-Chancellor) and his wife Puan Sri Laila Taib, Deputy Chief Ministers, Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam and Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, Unimas Board of Directors Chairman, Tan Sri Bijang Mohd Nor and Unimas Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Abdul Rashid Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said in this age, although university education was a necessity, the knowledge sought must be relevant to an individual's duties and responsibilities in society.

"It is a waste for degree holders to work as manual labourers. It is better if they work in the fields which require their expertise," he said. In conjunction with the ceremony, Unimas also composed a song for Dr Mahathir, *Negarawan Terbilang* (Distinguished Statesman).

Last year, at the Honorary Science Doctorate Degree conferment ceremony, a song entitled *Srikandi Negara* (National Heroine) was rendered for Dr Siti Hasmah.

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