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Embrace English to stay ahead, NSTP chief tells students

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SEPANG, Tues. - Students must embrace the English language and other languages while mastering Bahasa Melayu, to ensure Malaysia does not run out of skilled and efficient civil servants, corporate figures, academics and diplomats, New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd group-editor-in-chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad said yesterday.

He said in the past, Malaysian diplomats like Tan Sri Zain Azraai, Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, Tan Sri Razali Ismail, Tan Sri Kamil Jaafar and others were at the forefront of international conferences, preparing statement drafts and important documents.

"How did we lose that in 30 years? In the future there might not be a Bank Negara Governor as fluent in English as Dr Zeti (Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz), who holds her own in discussions with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank," he said in his speech at Universiti Putra Malaysia awards' night for its 2002/2003 undergraduates at the Cyberview Lodge Resort last night.

Speaking in Malay, he said he was glad that the Government was bringing back the English language without compromising the status of the mother tongue.

"The same has happened in China, several Arab countries, Japan, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

"I am not saying that only English is important, I am saying that all languages such as Mandarin, Spanish, German and French are important," he said.

In the past, he said, many people came from backgrounds with no knowledge of English but through the right attitude mastered the language.

"Have I, or (Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) and (Royal Prof) Ungku Aziz, become less Malay because we all speak and write good English or think we do?"

He also urged students to look to the future and adapt to the times, something that was achievable without compromising Islamic principles or values.

Emphasising the importance of substance and not form, he also said Islam needed those who were educated and contributed to the country and the ummah, and not those who only knew fardu ain (compulsory religious rituals).

He also said students must not isolate themselves and only mix with friends from the same race or district in a multi-racial country like Malaysia.

"Above all, you must remember that it is not how you start, but how you finish. You have a golden opportunity, so you must seize it. If you lose this, do not blame the Government or others. Blame yourself," he said, adding students should strive for excellence and not be contented with average performance.

At the event, Abdullah presented awards to students from UPM's Kolej 14 who were outstanding in the field of sports, academics and leadership.

Among the winners were Nor Aini Mohd Yusof (Leadership Award); Noris Mohd Norowi (Overall Best Student Award); Tengku Norbaiti Tengku Kamarulzaman, Hazizah Idris and Saiful Nizam Mohd Nor (Special Principal's Award), Say Yee How (Best Academic Award), Ardyanshah Mohd Ariffin (Sportsman Award) and Shazanora Mohamad (Sportswoman Award).

Also present at the event were UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd

Zohadie Bardaie and Kolej 14 headmaster Prof Madya Dr Jamal Talib.