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How Malay civilisation can be established

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - A Malay civilisation can only be established if the Malays and the Malay-speaking people are willing to advance in their material development and study languages of knowledge, such as English.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today it was also not wrong to learn foreign languages such as English, as long as Malay, the national language, was not neglected.

"The Arab and European civilisations gained from their willingness to study other languages.

"If the Arabs had confined themselves to studying only the original Arabic works, it is unlikely they would have led the world in the fields of science and mathematics and built their Islamic civilisation.

"Similarly, if the Europeans had also refused to study Arabic, they would not have gained from the knowledge accumulated by the Arabs from numerous sources. They would not have built the European and English-speaking civilisations," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address at the closing of the International Conference of Language and Nationhood here.

Dr Mahathir said Malay as the national language would not take a back seat if Malays and the Malay-speaking people mastered other languages.

In his address before more than 300 participants from over 20 countries, Dr Mahathir said:

"For better or for worse, Malaysia has decided that English should be studied more seriously as a second language and additionally, in order to gain rapid access to new scientific and mathematical knowledge, from the primary school level."