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PM: English just for Maths and Science

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there is no necessity to teach other subjects in school in English, other than Mathematics and Science.

"No, I don't think that there is necessity (to teach other subjects in English)," he said in an interview in the Asian Wall Street Journal programme, aired by CNBC TV, tonight.

"It is very important that we keep our identity and our language."

He said this in response to a question whether he was hoping that English would be used in the teaching of other subjects too.

On the use of the English language in teaching Mathematics and Science in schools, Dr Mahathir said it was because of the new situation and needs due to the rapid change in new technology, particularly information technology.

Saying that he did not change his mind over the Malay-based education system with the re-introduction of English, he said he had always told Malaysians to have a good command of English.

However, he said other views might have influenced people in opposing the implementation of teaching Maths and Science in English.

They had, he said, gone overboard in the sense that they had disregarded the importance of English.

"And now of course because of the new technology, IT in particular, a good command of English has become absolutely necessary. Otherwise, we cannot make any progress.

"So there is no harm in modifying or changing a policy because of new situations."

He said the change of policy in the education system was made after discussion with Cabinet members.

"This is something that I did not do on my own. It is done with co-operation, after discussion with my colleagues.

"I don't want to leave problems behind.

"If there is anything that I can do to resolve problems, then I will do (it)."

Dr Mahathir has announced that he would step down from all party and government posts after the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) meeting here in October.

He has named Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor.

On his retirement, the Prime Minister said he had agreed to stay a little longer on two conditions - that he would be allowed to retire after the OIC meeting and be allowed to go on two months holiday after the Non-Aligned Movement summit next month.

"Of course the NAM summit and OIC meeting are the two things that I've agreed on during my time and some foreign leaders are expecting me to be there," he said.

On a question that Abdullah should be given a fresh mandate to begin his premiership, he said: "Well, one of the things I've said recently was that all those people who were with me should at least offer to resign or should actually resign.

"They may be re-appointed by the new leadership ...it's good to have the new leader pick his own team."

On whether he was concerned that there would be an absence of what

people called strong leaders in Asia, Dr Mahathir said he did not think or assume that he was a strong leader.

On what was his achievement, Dr Mahathir, who has been Prime Minister for 22 years, said: "Well, I can say that I'm satisfied with what I've done, and what I have not achieved is to change the mindset of my own people."

However, he said he was glad that to a certain extent he had succeeded but not to the degree he had hoped for.

On what he planned to do after retiring, Dr Mahathir said he would take a rest and record some of his experiences which could be useful for researchers in the future.

In response to a question on Muslim countries, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia will do whatever it could to get Muslim countries to be united and face any challenge.

To a question that Islamic nations have no say in persuading the US to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict and on the issue of war against Iraq, Dr Mahathir said even Europe's views were not taken seriously by the US.

He said Malaysia hoped that other Muslims would regard the country as an example of how Muslims could live together with non-Muslims without any problem.

Dr Mahathir said they should also look at how Malaysia, as a Muslim country, could be administered well enough to achieve progress and that Muslims could be fair to everyone.

On Umno, Dr Mahathir said he was worried that bickering among party members could cause it to lose the support of the people by default, and not because the Opposition party was stronger.

Asked if the time was still right for the fixed exchange rate, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said there seemed to be no indication why there should not be a fixed exchange rate.

"Unless, of course, something happens to the US currency which makes it no longer a benchmark for the currency of the world," he said.

Malaysia has pegged its ringgit at 3.80 to one US dollar since September 1998, because of the financial crisis.

Dr Mahathir said the world had had a fixed exchange rate for a long time and during that period there was good growth for the whole world.

However, he said the world decided to go off the gold standard to allow speculators to determine the rate of exchange, and since then the world had faced many crises.