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Strive to be multi-lingual, students told

MIRI, Fri. - Malaysians should strive to be multi-lingual as this can help foster greater interaction between the races, besides it being an asset in the global arena.

Making the call today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in this regard, students should endeavour to master at least three languages - Bahasa Malaysia, English and Mandarin.

"It is important to master as many languages as possible, especially in multi-racial society like ours," he said at SMK Chung Hua Miri's 50th anniversary celebrations and the official opening of the school's new blocks, here.

Dr Mahathir stressed that Malaysians should master English as it was the lingua franca. "If you are fluent in English, it will help you and the country (to be more competitive)." He also said Malaysians should learn the mother tongues of the other races.

"In Sarawak, many Malays and Chinese are fluent in Bahasa Iban. Some Malays are fluent in Mandarin," he said.

On the national language, the Prime Minister said it could gain international acceptance if the country was successful.

"The language that would be the most well-received is the language of successful people. The reason why English is popular is because the British are regarded as successful people."

"So if we want to promote our (national) language, we need to be successful ourselves."

He said Bahasa Malaysia was now spoken by many foreigners "because Malaysia is becoming more successful".

Advising his audience of largely students, Dr Mahathir said they should have discipline and values.

"Many people fail because they lack discipline. People with discipline are honest and less likely to cut corners or cheat."

To the corporate sector, Dr Mahathir called on them to assist schools which needed funding, citing tycoon Tan Sri Ting Pek Khiing as an example.

Ting had funded the construction of the new school blocks.