

PM: Protect arts, heritage from global influence

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's arts and cultural heritage should be nurtured and preserved.

In making the call, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said art and culture were part of a nation's wealth and identity which must be protected against global influence.

He said culture and the arts were pillars that future generations would cherish.

"If we are not careful, we may lose our identity. So be careful not to be swept away by the cultural wave sweeping through the globe."

He also called on Malaysians to master the national language to help in nation-building.

"We must cultivate the common

and fluent use of Bahasa Malaysia."

Abdullah said the government wanted the people to be vibrant and dynamic in all areas to compete with others in the world.

"To achieve this, we must acquire knowledge, be hardworking, enthusiastic and willing to face challenges and hurdles," he said at the launch of the Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (Aswara), or National Arts, Culture and Heritage Academy, campus in Jalan Tun Ismail yesterday.

Speaking later, he said he was waiting to meet German auto giant Volkswagen AG chairman Martin Winterkorn to discuss a tie-up with national car-maker Proton.

"I was told he (Winterkorn) wanted to see me. I have yet to see

him and am still waiting. But I cannot wait for ever."

Apart from Volkswagen, US firm General Motors and three Malaysian automotive firms have expressed interest in partnering Proton, following the collapse last month of partnership talks with PSA Peugeot-Citroen of France.

Asked about the healthy state of the Kuala Lumpur Composite Index, Abdullah said it showed the people's confidence in the economy.

On the problem of obtaining visas for pilgrims wishing to perform the *umrah*, he said the matter was being resolved with the Saudi Arabian government.

On the abuse of the Internet by some bloggers, he said the government was monitoring the situation and would not hesitate to arrest those who broke the laws.

At yesterday's launch, he presented excellence awards to several Aswara graduates.

They are theatre director/scriptwriter/actor Shahili Abdan (or Nam Ron), musician Mohd Kamrulbahri Hussin, writer Siti Jasmina Ibrahim, dancer/choreographer A. Aris A. Kadir and harpist Khor Jee Fei.

Meanwhile, Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim said since 1998, Aswara had produced 268 diploma holders and 1,313 certificate holders.

He added that by 2010, about 2,800 students would have been admitted for certificate, diploma, advanced diploma and degree courses. Aswara received an injection of RM20 million under the Ninth Malaysia Plan to expand its premises and provide better educational facilities.