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Mastering English is not betrayal of Bahasa: Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR: Mastering English, the language of knowledge, is essential and not a betrayal of the national language, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

In his opening speech at the National Education Inaugural Congress organised by the Malay Consultative Council, the former prime minister said English is essential for Malaysians to be in touch with the latest developments in science and mathematics.

“The purpose of education is not to uphold a language but to comprehend knowledge.

“I do not believe that learning English means rejecting Bahasa.

“I know that my point of view will not go down well with most people, but if a language is the key to knowledge then we must learn that language to master the knowledge,” he said.

Mahathir also stressed the importance of science and mathematics in addition to religious studies, and the seeding of noble values within students.

“The words ‘science’ and ‘mathematics’ are not native to the Malay vocabulary. They are borrowed words.

“They are important knowledge fields that must be mastered for a nation to progress.

“Through Islam, the Arabs were told to read, and read they did.

“They did it in various languages, accumulating knowledge and becoming the most scientifically and mathematically advanced civilisation in the past,” he said.

However, besides instilling knowledge, schools should also inculcate traditions, culture and noble values, since today’s parents do not have time to take this on, he said.

“Religious education and moral classes in schools are not enough,” he said, claiming that youths lack noble values and are ensnared in social problems.

“They feel no shame for the wrong they have done. Look East. In Japan, if an aeroplane crashed, the transport minister would resign.

“But not here. We lack the discipline to uphold values and principles,” Mahathir said.

The one-day congress titled Upholding Malaysia’s National Education Blueprint 2013-2025 was held yesterday at Putra World Trade Centre.