



There is a need to master English

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English is so important in today's world that it has become almost indispensable. This sums up the feelings of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who says simple acquaintance with the language alone is not enough for new technologies to be learnt.

"There is a need for English to be completely mastered because the instructions are no longer going to be simple," he said at the Ninth MSC International Advisory Panel meeting.

"It is unfortunate perhaps for the language nationalists but that is the reality today. They must not blight the future generations by objecting to the mastery and usage of the English language. They must not obstruct Malaysia's progress and development." Dr Mahathir was in his usual forthright style on this and several other issues, such as the shortage of scientists, during his luncheon talk and the Press conference afterwards.

- *On the lack of self-confidence among graduates:*

"Their communication skills are so poor that sometimes they cannot even relay what they want to express in their own language. There is absolute silence when an interviewer them those questions... how is anyone going to employ people like that? If you show a blank face to the person who is interviewing you, then you are not going to get the job... it will not matter if you have a Master's degree."

- *On poor communication skills among young Malaysians:*

"It is almost cultural... Malaysians are shy. They need special coaching."

- *On the system of teaching in schools:*

"We cannot go on teaching in the old way anymore. We have to make use of new methods like using more software. You have multiple-choice questions where all the student does is tick the answer... they don't write essays or take oral examinations. That is bad."

- *On the need to welcome foreign scientists:*

"This is not about asking foreigners to take over what is rightfully ours, this is about research... if we do not take them, others will. Malaysia is a multi-racial country and in future, all countries will be multi-racial. For Malaysia to accept a few foreign scientists, it will not change the composition of the population of this country much. Today, Silicon Valley (in California) is full of Pakistanis, Indians, Iranians, Chinese and even Arabs."

- *On reports that all kinds of restrictions and conditions have been imposed on foreign scientists wanting to come to Malaysia:*

"Some of them are turned away because they fail the language test. Do we want scientists or language experts?"

- *On innovation and the Malaysian mindset:*

"We are not confident enough to innovate and have the tendency to do what has been done by others. Civil service officers appear to be very suspicious of researchers and innovators, especially with regard to money... if there is the slightest suspicion, the project would be called off. In time, we will produce enough of our own scientists with the mindset for R&D and perhaps those in charge of funds will understand that R&D is not like doing business."