



Teachers should adapt to subtleties of community: Masing

Bahasa.

By Raynore Mering

KUCHING: Social Development and Urbanisation Minister Dato Sri Dr James Jemut Masing believes that for the English language to be taught effectively, teachers should be able to adapt to the subtleties of the community they are serving.

He said the very survival of the English language through the centuries was due to its ability to adapt compared to languages like Latin and Greek which were losing their appeal in the world today.

Opening the education conference, 'teach2003: Annual Roundtable on Teacher Education' here yesterday, Masing said that the importance of the English language was not lost in the Malaysian society in light of the emphasis placed on it in schools by the government.

While noting that the government had introduced the use of English as the medium for teaching science and mathematics, he highlighted the effort made by Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to expand the use of English in its programmes.

"As we step into the 21st century, we see English becoming more prominent all over the world. We cannot escape from using English as a lingua franca in international trade, and as a gateway to the latest scientific and technological advancements," said Masing.

Pointing out that English served as an important purpose for communication and acquisition of digital technologies, he felt that it was only logical that the Malaysian society assessed where it stood today in terms of its mastery of the language. Some questions that they should ask, Masing said, was how regularly the language was used, what was the level of proficiency and what standard of English was expected by external agents.

He was pleased that these questions would be answered during the two-day conference themed 'Standard of English: Taking Stock',



PASSION FOR BOOKS ... Masing (centre) taking time to browse for books after opening the education conference. At left is Unimas Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Yusuf Hadi.

which, he said, was a timely and appropriate theme.

"Taking stock of our standards of English means that we are taking seriously the changes and challenges facing us. It also means honestly monitoring and facing — without losing face — our own proficiency problems in English," said Masing.

The roundtable discussion was organised by the Centre for Language Studies, Unimas.

It was the third in the series of annual roundtable discussions organised by the centre. This year, it was attended by 150 academicians, scholars, teachers and trainee teachers. The organising committee chairperson, Dr Ting Su Hie, said the event this year included a forum to enable participants to discuss and debate issues related to the presentations of the invited speakers.

She said the interactive nature of the event made it stand out from other English language teaching conferences where communication was normally one-way traffic.

Providing the background for the choice of the conference's theme, Ting said that in Sarawak, Bahasa Malaysia replaced English as the medium of instruction in government and government aided schools beginning from Primary One

in 1976.

She said this was in line with the national language policy on the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the official language and the first cohort with a Bahasa Malaysia educational background completed Form Six in 1989 and tertiary education in 1993.

"Since then, we have had streams of graduates entering the workforce, many of whom do not have the English language proficiency required for their jobs," said Ting, adding that the need to use English in the workplace due to globalisation had compounded their problem.

The speakers who had been invited to teach200 were Prof Dr Saran Kaur Gill (a professor of socio-linguistics and international communication at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), Dr Hannay Pilay (the Head of the Language and Literacy Department in the English Language Teaching Centre of the Education Ministry), Khatija Mohd Tahir (an examinations officer at the Malaysian Examinations Council), Associate Prof Peter F Cullip (an associate professor in educational linguistics at Unimas) and Dr Puvanesvary Muthiah (a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages at Universiti Utara Malaysia.)