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Regrettable State Of Bahasa Melayu Usage Among Malaysians

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The Malay adage, "melukut di tepi gantang", (literally meaning, broken rice grains by the bushel), perhaps best describes the current sad state of Bahasa Melayu usage among Malaysians.

An expert in the language feels that Bahasa Melayu has been sidelined in this country, its mastery unappreciated or its usage of little or no consequence to many.

Prof Datuk Dr Teo Kok Seong, Principal Fellow of the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, said Malaysian society today seemed to belittle the position, value and function of Bahasa Melayu, preferring to use a foreign language which they equated with keeping up with modernisation.

"Although Bahasa Melayu is their mother tongue and the national language, even the Malays appear to have lost respect for Bahasa Melayu through haphazard or improper usage."

Teo said this in reply to a question from one of the participants of a talk programme on the Malay language titled "Ungkaian Keindahan Bahasa Dari Buku Nadir dan Manuskrip Melayu", here, today.

Organised by the National Library of Malaysia (PNM) in conjunction with the National Language Month, the programme was officiated by PNM director-general, Nafisah Ahmad.

Although a Chinese, Teo regards real mastery of Bahasa Melayu as reflective of a person's values, what more if he or she is a Malaysian citizen.

He said the absorption of English words into Bahasa Melayu, especially in the business and social realms, had caused proficiency in Bahasa Melayu to be easily lost among the young generation.

"For example, many young people don't know there's the Bahasa Melayu word 'cengkeram' for 'deposit' used by most banks," he said.

Teo also criticised those non-Malays who refused to speak Bahasa Melayu although proficiency in the language was a condition for citizenship.

"Most non-Malays treat Bahasa Melayu only as an instrument to pass their school and government examinations," he said.

Head of the Bahasa Melayu Department of Universiti Malaya's Academy of Malay Studies, Prof Dr Abdul Razak Ab Karim, who was also present, said poor command of Bahasa Melayu was due to an individual's ignorance of the language itself, besides a disunited society.

"In the old days, Bahasa Melayu was a world language or lingua franca but it has now been neglected as people here prefer to be proficient in a foreign language," he noted.

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