Try hard to be the best

I REFER to the letter “Don’t make too big a deal of bad English” (NST, April 12) by P.B. Cheah. I disagree with the writer, who stated: “But for the average person, while faultless English or BM is desirable, it is not critical. The object of language is to communicate your thoughts to get a reaction or action. So, for most of us in our daily lives, what harm is there if we make a mistake or two in speech or in writing. The fear of making mistakes should not deter us from communicating.”

This kind of suggestion promotes only mediocrity. If such is the stand of all Malaysians, our country’s standards in education, economy and other developments will be stagnant or regress further.

Recently, I watched a presentation by a senior executive of a large Malaysian company, who claimed to deal with top executives, including expatriates from the United States and the United Kingdom.

There were many spelling and grammatical mistakes in his PowerPoint slides and his pronunciation was poor.

Although Malaysians could understand what he was saying, there were grins and remarks from the foreigner. I felt embarrassed and angry.

Over the years, I have come across many Malaysians who accept things that are sub-standard. It could be due to an attitude problem. Colloquially, we call this “tidak apathy,” and this mentality must change.

I believe that if one wants to do something, one must endeavour to be the best in it. That’s how I was raised, schooled, taught and trained, and I believe there are many people who are like me.

As far as the English language is concerned, we can and must be as good as, or even better, than native speakers.

Our country is striving to be on a par with First-World nations, with a high-income economy, in fewer than 10 years. However, if the people have an attitude that is less than perfect, our vision may not be achieved.

Many Malaysians are disappointed that none of our local universities made it to the top 100 in the world.

In the Times World University Rankings 2011-2012, none of our public universities made it to the top 400.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) ranked 40th and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU), 169th on the list.

In the QS World University Rankings 2011-2012, Universiti Malaya (UM) was placed 167th, Universiti Putra Malaysia 388th and Universiti Sains Malaysia in 335th. Comparatively, NUS was placed 28th and NTU 58th.

The rankings indicate the declining standards of our education. UM, one of the top universities in the country, has dropped from being one of the top 100 about 30 years ago to its present position.

In the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking for football, Malaysia was placed 156th, lagging behind the Philippines, Nepal, Malta, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Palestine, New Caledonia and Samoa. These are countries that our national team could beat easily previously.

The poor rating would have been unimaginable not too long ago when our national football team topped in Asia, beating Japan, China and South Korea. The present situation could be attributed to the poor attitude of our players and officials.

We need to emulate the right attitude as exemplified by some Malaysians.

Scientist Tan Sri Dr Salleh Mohd Nor has probably done more than any other University of Adelaide graduate in the past 50 years, according to the university’s alumni magazine, Lumen, to mark the 2011 International Year of Forests.

The Colombo Plan scholar, who obtained a Bachelor of Science (Forestry) in 1964, is internationally renowned for his research work on tropical forests, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Another fine example is Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman, who heads the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs. She would be the nearest thing that we have to a “take me to your leader” person, according to online portal www.news.com.au.

Pua Khien-Seng, the pride of Malaysian entrepreneurs, started Phison Electronic Corp in Taiwan while he was only 27.

The former local university reject invented the USB flash memory (pen drive).

In sports, Datuk Nicol Ann David, with her never-say-die attitude, coupled with hard work, has become world champion in squash for six consecutive years. She has also led the women’s world rankings since 2006.

In badminton, Datuk Lee Chong Wei is the world’s top player.

These exemplary Malaysians have shown us that with the right attitude, intelligence and hard work, we can be the best in the world.

So, let us stop promoting mediocrity and strive to be the best we can be.

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