

Malaysians can do better, says Abdullah

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PUTRAJAYA: Be like the Cubans.

In urging Malaysians to take a leaf out of the republic's book, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said despite hardship, the Cubans rose to the challenge and improved their country's economy.

"They had to endure sanctions from the United States and face political upheavals... but we see countries like these producing excellent human capital that not only contributed to their nations but also gave something to the world."

The Prime Minister was speaking before the *buka puasa* gathering organised by Wisma Putra here yesterday.

"Their focus on education and human capital development, for instance, enabled their rise... now we even see them sending their pool of doctors to help other nations in need.

"We are not short of anything... I know that Malaysians are going to be angry with me for saying this, but we can do better."

Abdullah said Malaysians must

continue to improve themselves and focus on human capital development, which is the country's main engine of growth.

He also took to task Muslims who gave Islam a bad name by not practising the religion's true teachings.

Speaking on challenges confronting Islam today, Abdullah said such people were tarnishing the religion even as Muslim leaders were promoting Islam as a divine religion.

He said Islam's call for Muslims to seek knowledge would not only complement the efforts to lift the status of the religion but would enable its followers to diffuse the negative perceptions on the religion.

"Islam will not be looked at positively if we do not follow the teachings of Allah.

"The sectarian conflicts within the ummah are serious and not easily resolved.

"If we are not united in the face of common threats, we will become weak," he said.

Abdullah, who is also chair of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, said it pained him to see the ongoing conflicts among Mus-

lims.

He said while many were fighting for the cause of the people in troubled nations like Palestine and Iraq, their leaders were not helping in the peace process.

"This is where the Muslim brotherhood should help in resolving problems."

Meanwhile, in its fifth meeting chaired by the Prime Minister yesterday morning, the National Biodiversity-Biotechnology Council approved the Biosafety Act, which would be tabled in the next parliamentary session.

The Council discussed the implications of the Act on the country's biotechnology industry and decided to give it the go-ahead.

Managing director of HOVID David Ho said the Act is aimed at regulating genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and making sure that the use of GMOs did not result in negative implications to the environment and human health.

The Biosafety Act is expected to complete the National Biotechnology Policy with a set of rules that will allow the industry to grow in a regulated manner.

Biotechnology is one of five core

technologies which will turn Malaysia into a highly industrialised nation by 2020.

Biotechnology includes the injecting of nucleic acid into cells or fusion of cells beyond their taxonomic family, which will result in more efficiently grown crops and less usage of pesticides and herbicides.

Ho said the Biosafety Act could also help control bio-terrorism, which involves the production of toxic materials used for acts of violence.

The Act will take into consideration access to biological resources and benefit sharing from such resources.

This includes royalty rights and prior informed consent to gain access to biological resources.

The Council took into consideration the application of biotechnology for the breeding of wild species of commercial value, specifically the *seladang*, for the purpose of conservation.

The Council also approved the decision of establishing a Natural History Museum in Malaysia and the formation of the National Technical Committee on Biodiversity Inventory.