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PM: Let's go the extra mile like Mr Mohan Singh

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was about to read from a prepared text at an event for youths here yesterday when he decided to speak from the heart.

It must have been the topic — patriotism — that moved the prime minister.

For 60 minutes, he spoke of how special Malaysia's diversity was, with people of various races loving the nation and each other.

Abdullah, defining a patriot as someone who meets this criteria, said Malaysians shared a common destiny based on mutual respect and help.

"A true Malaysian patriot loves Malaysia and all Malaysians," he told the 1,000-strong gathering that included Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, educationists, Umno veterans, youth leaders and students.

The 2007 Youth Patriotism Congress at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre was organised by Universiti Utara Malaysia and Biro Tatanegara at

the Prime Minister's Department.

Abdullah recounted his student days when a teacher by the name of Mohan Singh left an indelible mark on him by going the extra mile in English class.

"He was able to make me and other Malay students speak good English within a few months."

Abdullah said his English improved greatly as a result of the teacher's commitment to his job and his students.

The prime minister, touching on the contributions of leaders of all races to the nation in the past, said they had managed to unite various races.

He said Malaysians of all races should continue to play their role in taking the country to greater heights even though they were already in their "comfort zone".

"We are facing stiff competition which should not be taken lightly.

"Do we want to be left behind? Do we want to be the worst among the nations or the best among the best?"

"In other words, there is no full stop to what we can achieve.

"Even when we have achieved Vision 2020 and become a progressive and developed nation, we

must continue to be the best and the champion in Asia."

On unity, he said the various communities had no alternative but to work together because of their common destiny.

"If we fight among ourselves, we are finished. We must co-operate and work together.

"In this country, there is no such thing as 'you look after yourself and I look after myself'. This should not be as we must remain together forever."

Abdullah said it was up to the Education Ministry to make students fully understand the importance of co-operation, tolerance and respect for each other.

"These elements must be inculcated in them so that when they grow up, they will still be together."

Students, he said, must understand that the strength to develop the nation comes from the people.

Abdullah said no race should ever do anything to anger other races.

"Don't ever do this kind of thing. We must avoid this at all costs. If Malaysia is in trouble, nobody can survive."

Abdullah added that Malaysia was being watched by other nations because of its exemplary efforts.

"They are learning from us. We are the best when it comes to eradication of poverty and the process is still ongoing."

On sports, the prime minister lamented its sad state with the country taking a beating on several fronts.

"We were the best those days but today, with all the prosperity and everything, we are losing.

"Our facilities and infrastructure today are truly world-class (but not our sports)."

Abdullah said that the slogan "*cemerlang* (excellence), *gemi-lang* (glory), *terbilang* (distinction)" that he introduced when he became prime minister should become part of Malaysian culture.

"As I have said, there is no full stop to success and there is no time for us to relax.

"In this respect, it is vital for us to add value to ourselves and all the things that we do.

"I am value-adding myself, too, with knowledge. We can walk tall if we are knowledgeable."