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Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

GETTING AND KEEPING TOP TALENT

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he has observed a positive shift in Malaysian businesses towards producing greater varieties of top-notch products and services rather than more of the same basic goods.

"Naturally, top-notch offerings require top-notch people. This is why the search for talent has become so important to Malaysian businesses. Soon, the retention of talent will become

a top priority," he said at a dinner with the Kuala Lumpur Business Club last night.

Abdullah said Malaysia should not overly restrict the entry of skilled workers, particularly in strategic sectors, as it could benefit the country in the long run.

"I believe that the Malaysian working population will benefit from having greater interaction with foreign talent. Indeed, we can only improve ourselves if we work and learn with talented others," he said.

Abdullah also noted that more

Malaysian companies are going abroad and competing with the rest of the world, proving themselves to be worthy contenders in the process.

"Names like Petronas, Sime Darby, CIMB, AirAsia, YTL and many others, including small and medium enterprises, serve to reinforce our self-belief, that we can be global players if we set our hearts to it," he said.

The prime minister said that as more Malaysian businesses enter the global stage, the sense of a unique Malaysian

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PM's dream to put nation on road to excellence

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personality will emerge, much like US companies are seen as bold, German as precise and Japanese as cutting-edge.

"Malaysian businesses are increasingly known for being fair partners, for adapting well to other cultures, for giving back to society. How this Malaysian way develops in future will tell us not only about how we do business, but also how we are as a society."

In his speech, Abdullah outlined his vision of where

Malaysia should be when it celebrates its centennial independence.

He said 2057 should be about putting Malaysia on the road to excellence, distinguishing itself in all fields and scaling the heights Malaysians aspired.

"We will have Nobel laureates, truly global corporations, respected and market-leading brands, internationally-acclaimed poets and artists, among the largest number of scientific patents in the world, some of the best sports per-

sons on the planet, dare I even say the best football team in Asia? Our students and professors will dominate Ivy League universities and our own universities will be citadels of excellence for international scholars."

He said Malaysia should be pioneers in alternative energy, drawing on its strength in bio-fuels. Its cities would be the most livable on the globe, blending cosmopolitan facilities with a tolerant and just society.

The rise of regional eco-

nomics would motivate Malaysia to find its competitive advantage and lead in many strategic industries.

"We will become a true logistics hub, the undisputed Islamic financial centre and the global reference point for biotechnology and modern agriculture."

Abdullah said he had been mulling Malaysia's future direction in light of the 50th Merdeka anniversary and Vision 2020.

"This is the Malaysia of my dreams for 2057. This is what I

mean by *terbilang*. One hundred years of independence, one hundred years of advancement."

Later at a press conference, Abdullah said the government was willing to allow foreign companies to recruit foreigners to address the shortage of talent in the country.

However, he said, foreign talent brought into the country must be able to train or pass their skills to local workers. He said this was only a short-term initiative as more would be done to raise the

standard of education to produce more local talent.

On whether the Iskandar Development Region in Johor could be a model for the rest of the country if it succeeded in wooing more foreigners through its liberal policy, the prime minister said "yes".

Earlier this year, Abdullah announced the move to scrap the requirement of giving 30 per cent equity to Bumiputeras for Iskandar projects. He was also instrumental in bringing together incentives including tax holidays.