

PM challenges ministers to deliver on promise

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PUTRAJAYA: It is not often that a prime minister throws a challenge at one minister and holds another to his promise — publicly.

But that is exactly what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi did yesterday.

In launching the National Education Blueprint, Abdullah urged Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein to deliver on his promise to improve the quality of the education system.

He then threw a challenge at Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed. Looking at the two ministers present, he asked: "Hisham has promised to deliver the best students to your universities. Can your universities produce the best graduates?"

Both ministers smiled as those present at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre clapped heartily. Later, Mustapa told the *New Straits Times* that he accepted the challenge.

He said there had to be continuity from lower education to higher education and it was with that knowledge that the two ministries were co-operating closely.

"We have been talking with each other to co-ordinate our programmes a lot and there is a lot of synergy between us," he added.

Hishammuddin said: "Done. If we implement the cluster (programme) well, there will be more than enough to fill all available places in universities.

"But to me what's more important is when they graduate and start looking for jobs. They need to



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi launching the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix 2007 which will be held at the Sepang International Circuit from April 6 to 8. He also unveiled the new BMW Sauber F1 race car at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur last night. Some 120,000 spectators are expected to throng Sepang for the second-leg race.

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have the confidence, able to solve problems and have the command of at least two languages."

Abdullah said both the quality of the curriculum and the performance of teachers needed to be improved to ensure students could think out of the box. He said it was pointless having modern infrastructure or schools if the content of education was not at par with international standards.

"We need our students to add value to their studies, to have a spirit of competitiveness and to challenge themselves. They have to be innovative and develop their creativity," he said.

Abdullah said he wanted the teaching profession to be improved further and for Parent-Teacher Associations to play a stronger role in ensuring schools in the country performed well.

Abdullah said he hoped the

blueprint would be implemented properly to ensure students received the best possible education the ministry could deliver, adding that "it was not impossible to reach the peaks of success".

In his speech, Hishammuddin assured Malaysians that the blueprint had been carefully formed with the advice and opinion of educationists, teachers, parents and foreign education experts.

However, he said, as education was the responsibility of all Malaysians, the blueprint, planned over two years ago, would still be open to adaptation, revisions and enhancements based on feedback.

"The plan is not one that is fully new, not something which is fashioned from nothing, but a plan which has been formed based on today's realities and achieve-

ments.

"The plan is not designed to reject past implementations but to complete what is currently in the national education system," he said.

In the blueprint, the education ministry lays bare its plans and spells out its approaches for the next four years, including timelines on its delivery goals, and also shows how the mammoth RM23 billion allocation for education will be distributed under the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

Mindful that "everyone has an opinion on education", the ministry will explain its direction for key areas such as the strengthening of national schools, its "clusters of excellent schools", access to education and measures to empower teachers.

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