

PM: We must always reach for higher goals

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MELBOURNE: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said efforts to add value to national development programmes must be ongoing to ensure that the country remained competitive.

He said efforts should also be in tandem to develop human capital and bridge the economic gap between communities in order to achieve national objectives and provide for a better quality of life.

"In the development of a nation, there is no concluding chapter.

"Even after we achieve Vision 2020 to become a developed nation, the task of enhancing our position needs to be continued," he told 300 Malaysian student representatives here.

Abdullah, who is on a two-day visit to Australia, reminded the students that as future leaders, they would have to take development to greater heights.

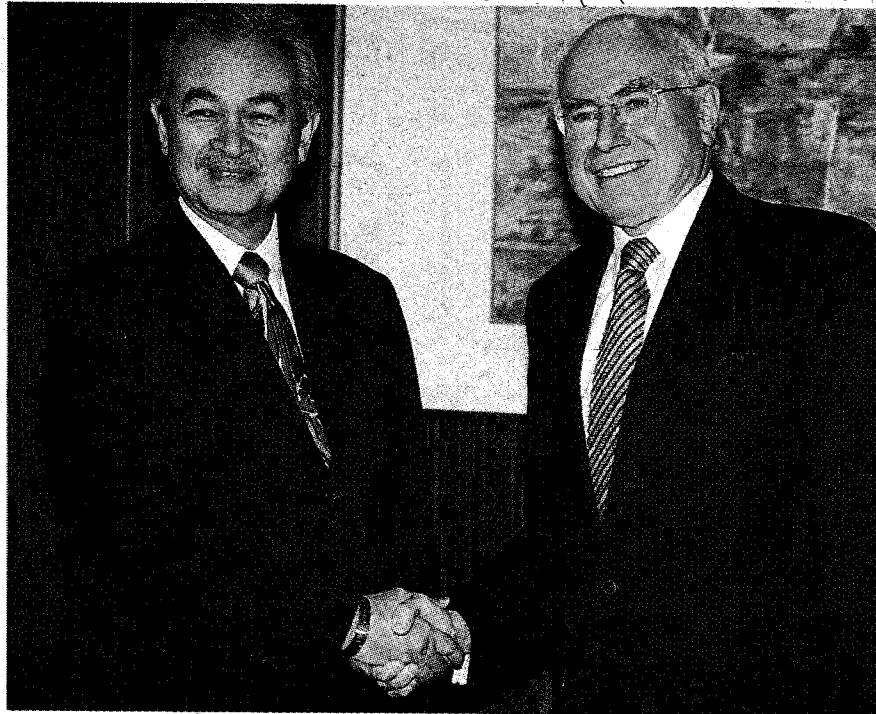
"You have to do better than what we have done now and must be able to compete," he said.

Currently, there are more than 5,000 Malaysian students here, the largest number among the 16,000 studying in Australia.

Abdullah said the development of the country started at zero when Tunku Abdul Rahman became the first prime minister after Independence, and "we have been able to build on our success to reach a higher platform by adding value to the programmes and activities that have been carried out".

He said Tun Abdul Razak Hussein emphasised the restructuring of society while Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad helmed a period of modernisation emphasising industrialisation.

Now, the country's emphasis was on developing a knowledge-



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi meeting Australian Prime Minister John Howard at Treasury House in Melbourne yesterday. — Bernama picture

based economy which called for the people to be more innovative and creative.

He said the multiracial and multicultural population of Malaysia should be looked at as an asset and not a liability, as there was a need to get the best out of the communities.

Abdullah also attributed Bursa Malaysia's record breaking streak to the government's tireless and continuous efforts to attract investment.

"This is not an overnight achievement," he said referring to the benchmark Kuala Lumpur Composite Index (KLCI), which surpassed 1,360 yesterday.

"We are happy. We thought we could make it to 1,350.

"Now we have surpassed the

1,350 level; the highest ever," he said.

The KLCI, which hit its highest level of 1,359.76 in the morning session, rose further in the afternoon, with the index closing at a new all time high of 1,363.40, up 26.1 points or 1.53 per cent.

Abdullah, who is also finance minister, said the KLCI's record high signalled growing confidence in the Malaysian economy.

"While there are people who are unsure, many have actually shown their confidence towards the country's economy and have invested in the stock market, which is reflected in the current surge," he said.

The strong ringgit, which had appreciated to the RM3.42-RM3.41 level, also helped to fur-

ther strengthen the economy, he said.

During a question-and-answer session that followed, Abdullah said he would ask the Election Commission to consider allowing Malaysian students abroad to register as voters with the country's missions and vote during the general election or by-elections.

This is because 80 per cent of eligible Malaysians who had not registered as voters were those aged between 21 and 35 years.

Earlier, during a meeting with Australian Prime Minister John Howard at Treasury House here, Abdullah said he discussed issues that would be raised at the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting in Sydney. — Bernama