

NEW STRAITS TIMES

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# Call for tie-up with foreign varsities

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The prime minister has suggested that local universities hire foreign academics on contract or set up partnerships with foreign institutions to boost their standing.

"Co-operation with other universities will also give our own academicians a chance to take a sabbatical to gain experience and widen their horizons," Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"It is a borderless world when it comes to seeking knowledge. You can go anywhere you want," he said.

"If there is something offered that can be useful to you and Malaysians, by all means get it."

Besides twinning programmes with other universities, he also suggested that universities "open their doors" to international students to obtain higher degrees.

"Allow them to study and obtain their Master's or doctorate at your university.

"There might be courses in our country that may be of interest to them," he said after officiating the Universiti Malaya Alumni Day: Homecoming 2008.

He also said universities should focus on research and development, making sure that it covered many subjects.

In his speech earlier, the prime minister said he was pleased that UM was the top university in the country.

"It is fitting since it is the premier university and the most senior university in the country. I do not want to use the term 'old' to describe UM," he said, eliciting laughter from the audience.

He is a UM alumnus from the class of 1964 where he was enrolled



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi receiving a picture montage from UM Alumni president Datuk Noordin Abdul Razak after launching UM Alumni Day: Homecoming 2008. — Bernama picture

in the Faculty of Arts (Islamic Studies).

However, UM should not be content to be the academic champion of Malaysia, he said.

"We should aim to be the best in Asean or among the best in the world."

He acknowledged that it was a goal that was not easy to reach.

"The world is big and the challenges are large. But for me, it should not be seen as challenges or problems, but as opportunities."

The university had achieved and given much to the country in the past 50 years, said Abdullah but "we want more".

The focus was to produce first-class human capital, he said.

Giving examples of classic Malay *pantun* (poetry) that reflected de-

termination and strength, he said this clearly showed that Malaysians were not a shy or cowardly people.

Abdullah expressed his faith in the capabilities of vice-chancellor Datuk Rafiah Salim saying "she was not just any woman" and that former United Nations chief Kofi Annan himself had expressed his admiration of her.

Abdullah also launched the coffee table book *The Calling of Pantai Valley*, which was produced by the UM alumni team.

Angkasawan candidate Major Dr Faiz Khaleed, also a UM alumnus, presented a copy of the book to Abdullah, arriving and leaving the stage in an imitation spacecraft, a gimmick which received much applause from the audience.

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