

School of choice

The Star + 28/4/2004, m/s: 1, 2.

PM unveils strategy to promote integration and boost quality of education

BY IZATUN SHARI

PETALING JAYA: The Government wants to make national schools "the school of choice" under a two-pronged strategy to promote racial integration and improve the quality of education.

The other part of the strategy is to develop universities and colleges into world-class institutions.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in outlining the strategy, said changes and improvements needed to be implemented to make national schools the preferred schools while safeguarding the position of national-type schools.

The Prime Minister said that to help the national schools achieve this objective, the Government would:

- IMPROVE the quality of teaching;
- INCREASE the number of non-Malay headmasters;
- CREATE more opportunities for the different races to mix; and
- HAVE high-quality language lessons.

He said parents' concerns about the quality of national schools would have to be addressed so that they would gladly choose to send their children to high-quality multi-racial schools.

"National schools should be topmost in providing foundation skills and knowledge as well as in cultivating inter-racial tolerance and understanding," he said when opening the Malaysian Education Summit 2004 at Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel here yesterday.

Abdullah expressed concern over schools becoming more mono-racial, with the non-Malay environment in national schools growing smaller with time.

"Even in multi-racial schools and universities, racial cliques are practically the norm.

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Pak Lah mulls over ways to motivate teachers

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"Surely this kind of racial exclusiveness will sow the seeds of misunderstanding and mistrust later in life," he said.

Abdullah also said the quality of teaching in national schools was one of the biggest areas of concern.

"The teaching profession is no longer as highly regarded as it was before. This is a great pity."

He said the quality of teaching must be improved by enhancing the motivation and stature of the profession, and several aspects like recruitment, training, promotion processes, benefits and the work environment must be looked into.

He added that there must be more non-Malay teachers and headmistresses to reflect the character and spirit of a multi-racial country.

"We also need to increase opportunities for the different races to mix, such as having twinning programmes where national schools and vernacular schools come together and interact for sports or co-curricular activities."

Abdullah said that high-quality language lessons in Chinese, Tamil or Arabic should also be taught in national schools and be an optional subject for all students regardless of race.

"I believe the mother tongue is important. We should all start valuing languages as a worthwhile knowledge in itself and as an investment in an increasingly globalised world," he said.

"We need to strengthen Islamic and ethics education in national schools to instil the right values in our young."

On the second strategy, Abdullah



TOWARDS QUALITY EDUCATION: Abdullah opening the Malaysian Education Summit 2004 at Sunway Resort Lagoon Hotel in Petaling Jaya yesterday. With him from left are: Asli Foundation/Board of Trustees chairman Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah, Education Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Mohd Shafie Mohd Salleh, Asli chief executive officer/director Datuk Dr Michael Yeoh, H'ng and Pelanduk Publications managing director Datuk Ng Tieh Chuan.

said the quality of tertiary institutions should be consistently benchmarked.

"We also need to increase the links between academia and industry to ensure that graduates are workforce-ready and research undertaken is geared towards meeting the needs of the market," he said.

He added that tertiary institutions

should have sufficient support facilities to help market their graduates.

Abdullah also launched a book entitled *5 Men 5 Ideas* on nation-building and building a national identity, written by H'ng Hung Yong and jointly produced by Asli and Pelanduk Publications.

The book focuses on the key roles of

Malaysia's five former leaders — Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad — who contributed to the idea of a plural society in their own way.

It also highlights issues that will dominate the national agenda of the current Prime Minister.