

■ **Centres of tolerance, excellence:** Renewal vital for unity, says PM

School system overhaul

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■ **By Firdaus Abdullah**

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. — Overhaul national schools to make them the first choice for education, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi urged today.

Emphasising the need for an early-education system which cultivated inter-racial understanding while providing quality education, Abdullah said his proposed revamp of national schools was intended to promote unity and excellence among Malaysians.

“We need to effect changes and improvements to make national schools the ‘Schools of Choice’ while safeguarding the position of national-type schools today,” he said.

Abdullah also called for the recruitment of more non-Malay teachers and headmasters.

“We must address the concerns of parents about their quality and rectify them so that parents will gladly send their children to a high-quality, multi-racial school.”

The Prime Minister said this in his keynote address on “Revitalising Education: Equipping Malaysia for the Realities of the 21st Century” at the Malaysian Education Summit 2004 here.

The summit is jointly organised by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI), the Education Ministry and Ministry of Higher Learning.

In his address to hundreds of academicians, education industry entrepreneurs and senior government officials, Abdullah proposed, among others, the introduction of language lessons in Mandarin, Tamil and Arabic, giving students the option to choose regardless of their racial or religious background.

The Prime Minister also said that it was necessary to enhance teachers’ training and to educate teachers to be aware and responsive to multi-racial sensitivities.

Strengthening Islamic and Ethics education, reviving co-curricular activities and introducing twinning programmes were also among his recommendations for national schools.

Abdullah said the Government was serious about enhancing the role of national schools and would do all it

PM suggests system of ranking for nation's public universities

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took to ensure their transformation.

He said co-curricular activities also needed attention as without such activities students would be one-dimensional individuals in an exam-oriented society.

"(This) will require a shift in mindset and a change in attitude, but I believe it will benefit all of us in the long run. I hope parents, teachers and other stakeholders will help make this a reality," Abdullah said.

The Prime Minister also pinpointed specific measures to turn the nation's universities and higher learning institutes into world-class institutions.

"We need to consistently measure and benchmark the quality of our tertiary institutions, starting with public universities. I believe that a league table that ranks public universities based on criteria such as quality of teaching, research, infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability is long overdue.

"The healthy competition fostered between universities can help motivate the pursuit of better teaching, better courses and better research. Eventually, the rankings could form the basis for the amount of government funding received by these universities, thus adding a further incentive for quality improvements," Abdullah said.

He also called for stronger links between higher learning institutions and the job market, to reduce unemployment among graduates, and for the infusion of a life-long learning culture among graduates.

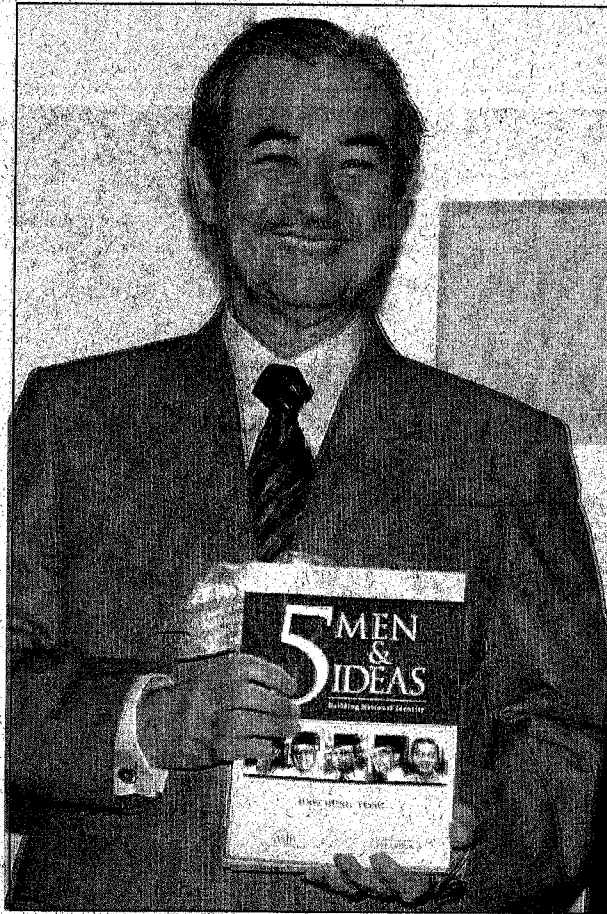
The Prime Minister said that the ultimate goal of a credible system could only be achieved with the full participation of all Malaysians.

"Our education system also includes parents, the support the local community provides, the synergies the private sector is willing to forge, the awareness the media is willing to create and how much successful Malaysians are willing to give back to their schools and universities.

In his keynote address, Abdullah also revealed why the education portfolio had been split.

"The gaps in quality and national unity are urgent issues, and I wanted the two ministers to concentrate on smaller but equally crucial areas," he said.

Education Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Higher Learning Minister Datuk Shafie Salleh, who were both present, welcomed the Prime Minister's state-



IDEAS THAT COUNT: Abdullah with a copy of *5 Men 5 Ideas* by H'ng Hung Yong that he launched after delivering the keynote address at the Malaysian Education Summit 2004 yesterday.

ments as a boost to the efforts of their respective ministries.

"The recruitment of more non-Malay teachers and headmasters, and the introduction of mother-tongue language lessons

are important measures," Hishammuddin said. "We will be making some announcements in the near future, but our aim is to provide quality early education to all Malaysians irrespective of race or religion.

"It's not only focused on education but also national cohesiveness in the true spirit of unity in diversity," he said.

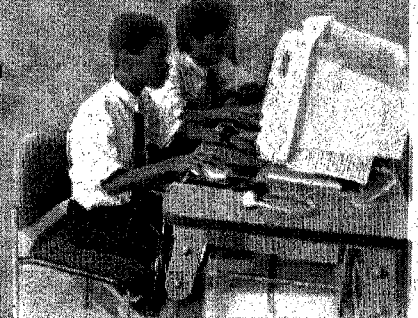
Shafie, meanwhile, said he expected the suggestions to be well received by all.

EDUCATION: ABDULLAH'S VISION

For National Schools

> High quality language lessons in Mandarin, Tamil and Arabic to be open to all students, regardless of race or religion.

> Strengthen Islamic and Ethics Education to instil noble values.

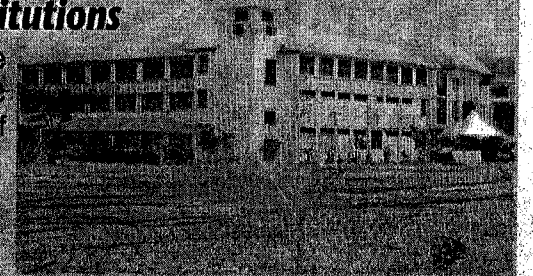


> To increase the number of non-Malay teachers and headmasters.

> To introduce school twinning programmes where national and vernacular school students get together for sports and other co-curricular activities.

For Tertiary Institutions

> To introduce a league table which ranks public universities on quality of teaching, research, infrastructure, student satisfaction and employability.



> To increase links between academia and industry to ensure graduates can get jobs easily.

