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PM's reminder on national unity

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Students quiz Abdullah on a variety of topics including sticking to promises

KUALA LUMPUR: Despite his hectic schedule, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took time off to address a large group of college and university students at a hotel here.

The Prime Minister made full use of the weekend opportunity as he emphasised the importance of maintaining national unity.

"I grew up in a 100% Malay environment but when I went to school, I made a lot of friends of all races.

"I used to go to my Chinese friend's house and his mother would ask me, 'Abdullah, *lu ciak liao?*' which means 'have you eaten?'" Abdullah said, recalling his younger days.

He also took questions from the floor at the session. The following is an excerpt of the Q&A session.

Question: Since it is our generation which will become the country's future leaders, are we on schedule

to achieve Vision 2020?

A: If our growth can be maintained at 6%, then we are on schedule. But now we may not achieve 6% because of the increase in fuel prices. We have allocated lots of money to achieve this but now the prices of building materials have also gone up steeply and this has also affected our development budget. There is inflation and the *rakyat* is certainly not happy. Such is the situation at the moment. But we have to continue to fight.

Q: There are some irresponsible politicians out there making irresponsible statements. What is your view on this?

A: We hear from both sides of the political divide about irresponsible politicians - from the Government and the Opposition, too. But we have to comment through replies in Parliament and via our manifesto.

We must keep on reminding everyone that if they want Malaysia to be a country that is peaceful, there must be restraint. We have to be moderate and we hope that there will be people who will listen and remind others that this is what we want to do.

Q: To be honest, the civil service does not seem to be very colour blind. Do you have any plans to review the civil service?

A: I know you're not happy with the situation that seems to have more Malays. We're now progressively making a lot of changes to be more representative in the nation's civil service. We're also aware that there may not be enough non-Malays at certain levels.

But today, we have created a mechanism, for instance, the anti-inflation council. We ensure that we have members from the pri-

vate sector, who are non-Malays from high executive positions, to participate in the council. We want the council to be multi-racial.

Q: How do you feel about the promises that you have made to us but haven't kept?

A: My intention is to implement what I promised. When I introduced my manifesto in 2004, that manifesto outlined many things. It's not only for the first five years but meant to go on right up to Vision 2020. We've started (working) on it, and we're determined to achieve the objectives, the law and mechanisms that need to be introduced; this has to be done. I'm aware that the reform of the judiciary and the ACA has not been done.

That was one of the promises I made. For the commission of the ACA, that has been decided upon.

The subject will be debated in the next Parliament session and I hope that it will get the okay from Parliament. At the same time, the introduction of the Judicial Commission has been announced and it was one of the things we wished to do.

The reform of the police force has already started but we still have one or two more things that we need to look into, so we'll continue with that. The reform of the financial and education sectors has already started.

There are challenges we have to face. I've chosen a very important agenda, which is transparency and accountability.

It is not easy because you have to change people's attitudes, you have to inculcate new values and make social changes because it is important for the future of Malaysia.