

Headline **UM and USM lead the way**  
Date **29. Aug 2008**  
Media Title **The Star**  
Section **Nation**  
Circulation **293375**  
Readership **1026812**

Language **ENGLISH**  
Page No **26**  
Article Size **168** cm2  
Frequency **Daily**  
Color **Black/White**  
AdValue **2547.40**



# UM and USM lead the way

They are frontrunners for apex status

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**PETALING JAYA:** Both Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Universiti Malaya (UM) are frontrunners to receive apex university status.

Many believe that by virtue of its history and status UM would be the natural choice but USM may spring a surprise.

In last year's *Times* Higher Education-QS World University Rankings, UM was the highest ranked at 246, followed by USM at 307, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) at 309 and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) at 364.

UM was the only public higher education institution to obtain a five-star rating in the Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions 2007.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawj is expected to announce the name of the university selected under the accelerated programme for excellence (apex) when he delivers Budget 2009 at the Dewan Rakyat today.

A selection committee headed by former Universiti Malaysia Sarawak vice-chancellor Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Mohamad Zawawi Ismail short-listed four universities — UM, USM, UKM and UPM.

Other universities that applied for the status

were International Islamic University Malaysia, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia as well as two private universities — Universiti Teknologi Petronas and Universiti Tenaga Nasional.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin had said the chosen university had the greatest potential among Malaysian universities to be world-class and as such, would be given additional assistance to compete with top-ranked global institutions.

USM's plan was titled "Transforming higher education for a sustainable tomorrow", focusing on environmental issues.

The recommendation to have at least one apex university was contained in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan which was launched by Abdullah in August last year.

He had said the country would select one or two apex universities, which would be granted more autonomy and resources to create an environment that would attract the best students and faculty.