

29/09/2000

Abdullah clears misconceptions on wide range of issues

Ramlan Said in Tokyo

DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday met with 14 senior journalists of Japanese newspapers and took the opportunity to clear their doubts about a diverse range of topics on Malaysia.

In a frank and open one-hour dialogue, the Deputy Prime Minister who is on a four-day working visit to Japan, responded to among others questions on the selective capital controls introduced by Malaysia, the Multimedia Super Corridor, the Grik arms heist by the Al-Ma'unah group, the fight against religious extremism, Umno and Islam.

Other questions posed were on Asean's constructive engagement policy with Myanmar, the kidnappings by Abu Sayyaf group and the leadership transition in Malaysia.

The dialogue began on a slow note but gained momentum not long after that with various questions posed to the Deputy Prime Minister.

But before it concluded, Abdullah turned the tables against the journalists, asking for their opinion on Malaysia and whether the country would survive or "collapse" as predicted by some quarters.

Among those present were senior editors and writers from the Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Japan Times, Daily Yomiuri, Mainichi Daily News and Asahi Evening News.

Responding to a question on the kidnappings by foreign gunmen on islands off Sabah, Abdullah said the Government realised the concern among Japanese tourists.

"Security in the waters off the State has been beefed up with the police and army taking various steps to prevent further armed intrusions."

He was asked whether Malaysia supported the military operations carried out by the Philippines army.

"It is up to them ... The Philippines Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon told me yesterday that it was important that his Government deal with the kidnappers firmly."

Abdullah and Siazon yesterday attended the Asean-Japan Relations Symposium where the former delivered a keynote address.

A question was also posed to Abdullah on him succeeding Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, especially in the light of him taking over the position with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's removal in 1998.

"I don't really want to speculate on the matter ... I have been given a job to do, so I do it," he said.

Earlier, Abdullah expressed the hope that the dialogue would give the journalists a better understanding of Malaysia, saying it would go a long way in correcting misconceptions about the country.

He said Malaysia-Japan bilateral ties had been established a long time and it had benefited both countries.

Abdullah said the Government was committed towards attaining positive growth and maintaining racial harmony, stressing that to do well in economy, there must be peace in the country.

(END)