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DPM: It's a battle of wits (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Police and enforcement authorities should act faster against illegal video compact discs pedlars who resort to new tricks in selling their pirated goods, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

Describing it as a "battle of wits", he said the pedlars of pirated and pornographic VCDs were able to come up with new tactics using modern communications and transportation to elude the authorities.

"They have ample resources to plan their counter measures or avoid arrest," he said after flagging off the "Riding for Life 2003" cycling event organised by the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) and the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) at Taman Tasik Titiwangsa.

He was responding to a question on what was being done about pedlars who were selling their goods from bags instead of setting up stalls.

"It is always like that. We always face these tactics and tricks from these groups and the police and all relevant authorities must be faster (than them)," he said.

The nationwide crackdown on illegal VCDs revealed that some operators tried to confuse enforcement officials by displaying VCDs with genuine Film Censorship Board's "B" stickers when raids were carried out but later replaced them with VCDs bearing false stickers.

Some pornography distributors were also found to be passing off smut video compact discs by packaging them as locally produced movies.

Last Thursday, police were given two weeks to come down hard on those responsible for the distribution of illegal VCDs and electronic gaming machines, following a directive from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

On the June 8 deadline, Abdullah said he would seek an update from the police and other agencies.

He said he had not received any report on the crackdown against illegal VCDs, as he had just returned from a one-week holiday overseas yesterday.

Asked about Dr Mahathir's participation in the two-day G8 Summit Informal Dialogue in Evian, France, starting today, Abdullah hoped the G8 would pay attention to the Prime Minister's views.

"I think this is one of the best opportunities for Dr Mahathir (to voice his views), especially since he is the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

"With that he can be seen as airing the concerns of NAM countries, which recently held its summit here," he said.

At the event today, Abdullah flagged off about 300 cyclists comprising participants and supporters of the project. Thirty-five participants will travel past 17 villages and five towns across the peninsula to Singapore.

Sponsored by Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia, the fund-raising project involves 20 participants from Malaysia and five from Singapore who will cycle 949km in eight days. The participants raised RM176,986 in pledges.

Standard Chartered also pledged to top up the fund with RM100,000.

Abdullah was glad the private sector was committed to charitable campaigns such as this and thanked them for their positive response.

"Based on my experience, they (private sector) want to see commitment from the organisers and an organised and orderly programme. If the organisers are accountable and use the funds properly and according to their goals the private sector will find it easier to come forward and

help out," he said, adding that MAF and MAC were good examples of organisations with good practices.

MAC president and MAF chairwoman Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir said the money collected by MAF would fund the needs of those living with HIV/AIDS in Malaysia.

Present were Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia chief executive officer John Kivits.