

Malaysia to send troops despite Israeli objection

• By **Noor Adzman Baharuddin, Alina Simon and Ahmad Fairuz Othman**
news@nst.com.my

SIK: Malaysia will go ahead with its plan to send troops to Lebanon as part of the international peacekeeping force despite objections from Israel.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday that Israel did not have any power to decide who could take part in the force.

Abdullah said he had informed

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan of Malaysia's willingness to send a peacekeeping battalion to southern Lebanon.

"If Israel wants to object, let them. They cannot decide who can be part of the force," he said when asked to comment on a news agency report recently.

"The one with the final say is Annan."

Reuters reported that Israel had lodged its objection with the UN on the grounds that it did not have any diplomatic ties with Malaysia.

Abdullah said: "I discussed this with Annan when he called about 10- days ago during the UN Security Council meeting.

"He asked for the views of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries, as he knew we had a meeting in Kuala Lumpur recently."

Abdullah, who is OIC chairman, said he informed Annan of its call for an unconditional ceasefire, Israel's pullout from Lebanon and an expansion of the UN's peacekeeping role.

He said Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora had recently called to confirm Malaysia's par-

ticipation in the force.

"I told him that we were ready to move out any time, just waiting for the nod from the UN," he said after launching the national blueprint for the development of the agro-based industry here.

Meanwhile, in **Putrajaya**, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the people of Lebanon, welcomed Malaysian peacekeepers.

Malaysia, he said, had an excellent record of peacekeeping service.

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Abdullah shaking hands with some of the people who came to hear him speak in Sik yesterday. — NST picture by Shahrizal Md Noor