

The focus is on 9MP rollout

IT was almost midnight when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi completed his third interview with the Indonesian media.

The reporters from *Republika* newspaper, the Antara news agency and Metro TV had all insisted on separate interviews, believing that they could secure some exclusive news from the Prime Minister.

But in the end, the questions posed to Abdullah at his suite in Hotel Mulia were all quite similar.

They wanted to hear from Abdullah, who heads the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, on the attacks on Lebanon by Israel and the inability, even fear, of some Arab countries to take a stand, let alone retaliate.

His tough remarks pleased the media, even though he was his soft-spoken self.

He told them that he was unhappy that the international community was unable to react.

He described the United Nations as in a state of apparent "paralysis" while internal sectarian conflicts among Muslims had weakened the Arabs in the region.

In short, Muslim nations could not even get their act together, and some countries in the Arab League may have even endorsed the action against the

Islamic groups, believing they are a threat to their positions and governments.

"Maybe they know better," he said, when the TV reporter told him that the Hezbollah militant group had claimed some Arab countries silently supported the Israeli attack.

As the television crew finally packed their cameras and equipment and left his room, Abdullah finally found some privacy.

That was the end of his programme for the day. Since arriving at Jakarta at 7pm, he had attended meetings with Malaysian officials, and hosted a *nasi padang* dinner meeting in his room.

My *sembang* (chit-chat) session with the Prime Minister, together with another newspaper editor, was the last item for the day.

He was keen to listen to our views on Umno, the economy, and our concerns on race relations and religion. In turn, he shared his thoughts on the importance of national security.

But it was the importance of the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP) which preoccupied his thoughts.

"I have announced the first rollout of the projects under the 9MP. I will be announcing the PFI (private initiative programme) projects soon," he said.



"The details will come out one after another. Watch out for the announcement in Johor on July 30 (Sunday)."

Since his return from Perth in Australia, where he had undergone a minor nose operation for his sinus problem, he certainly looked much fresher, and ready to tackle the harder tasks ahead.

Gone were the constant coughs, whenever he delivered a speech, which Malaysians were familiar with.

He did not know the coughs were related to his nose problem and when he did, he tried to postpone the operation, giving excuses that he could not find the time.

"It was finally the ladies ... my daughter, my daughter-in-law and others who made sure I had the operation," he said with a laugh.

He has been able to sleep better and in the words of some, is now in "combative" mood following his short break Down Under.

Abdullah acknowledged the positive impact of the treatment, saying his whole attention was on the 9MP.

Last week, he announced the first rollout of 880 projects worth RM15bil, which worked out to be an average of RM17mil each. These projects would be awarded by open tender.

The Government envisages an expenditure of RM200bil on development projects, and a further RM20bil under the PFI programme.

This weekend, Abdullah is expected to release details of the Southern Corridor development in Johor, which is one of the biggest 9MP projects.

Up to RM10bil has been budgeted for the massive development, which includes the proposed Nusajaya township, styled after Putrajaya, and the waterfront of Danga Bay.

There are also plans to make Johor a transport hub with the expansion of its infrastructure links, including the high-speed rail link to Kuala Lumpur.

"It's going to be exciting. We are talking about the making of a metropolis along the lines of Hong Kong and Shenzhen," Abdullah said.

Given its strategic position, he said, it would not be surprising if the development of the Southern Johor Corridor overtook Kuala Lumpur and Penang

when fully completed.

"That is the level of massive development that will be taking place and we need to get our act together," he said.

It was clear that Abdullah did not want to be distracted by the political squabbling which had distracted the attention of Malaysians, to the core issues of nation-building.

He was concerned with the need to refocus the energies of Malaysians on the economy, hoping the 9MP would put the economy back on the path of recovery.

"I think that's what Malaysians are interested in. They want to see development in the country and for the first time, we are planning the implementation of the 9MP," the PM said.

From the 39th floor of the hotel, he looked at the skyline of Jakarta. It was dark and nothing like Kuala Lumpur with its brightly lit structures.

But the city is catching up fast and Kuala Lumpur cannot lag behind. From the expensive shops at Plaza Indonesia and Pondok Indah Mall to the fashionable eateries in the city, there is plenty of excitement here.

A big push from the 9MP projects will keep us ahead.

"We have to make the future of Malaysia bright for all," Pak Lah said.