

# Abdullah peeved over delayed prisons project

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**KUCHING:** He was there to inspect a prisons project that was well behind schedule. Moments later, he emerged from the site, peeved at what he had seen.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi now wants the Anti-Corruption Agency to get to the bottom of the matter.

After nine years, the project is barely half-complete. It was not built to specifications, and now requires more money.

There are also off-position pillars, and some blocks may not be safe for occupation if things are not rectified.

The project, designed to ease congestion at the 113-year-old Kuching Prison, was awarded to WMM Holdings Sdn Bhd in 1997 for RM165 million.

But this contract was terminated in July 2002 when the project stalled.

The Federal Public Works Department, which took over, awarded the project to TSR Bina Sdn Bhd in September 2004.

Work resumed in January last year. The company is to complete it by the end of this year for RM54.7 million.

Now, TSR Bina is asking for another RM43.7 million, and the new completion date is Sept 1, 2007 "because of so many defects in the building blocks".

After being briefed by project superintendent Latifah Mohd Salleh yesterday, Abdullah said there was evidence that many buildings were not constructed in accordance with the specifications.

"The materials used were not the ones specified. There were also posts erected in the wrong positions," he said.

Abdullah said the foundations were weak.

"All these show that those given



The Prime Minister says some of the buildings may have to be demolished.

the tasks were irresponsible."

He said it was clear that supervision was weak.

"I thought the project could be completed by pumping in more funds, but after looking at the whole thing, it is not to be.

"Some of the buildings may have to be demolished. Therefore, the funds used to build them have been wasted."

Abdullah said TSR Bina could not resume work because the PWD and an independent consultant had found a lot of defects in the buildings.

"This matter has been referred to the ACA, and I wish to get the report from the ACA on what happened to the buildings. ACA has to come in to investigate any wrongdoing."

He said he would not make a decision on the request for funds

because of so many problems.

"I will call for a meeting as soon as possible in Kuala Lumpur to make a final decision on the project, whether to continue by pumping in more funds or to demolish all the buildings and build new ones," he said.

Earlier, Latifah said on paper, the project was 80 per cent completed. "But after we conducted a ground investigation, we found it was only 40 per cent completed."

She said some buildings had been demolished because their structures had weakened.

The prison, she said, was supposed to accommodate 1,500 inmates. However, after some changes to the plans, it will be able to accommodate only 500 male prisoners and 150 female prisoners.

Latifah, who is a director with

the PWD, said the project on a 42ha site would house the state prisons headquarters, a Henry Gurney School for juvenile offenders and staff quarters.

The new central prison is to ease overcrowding at the present prison in the city centre which was built in 1882.

The Kuching Prison, hemmed in by four schools in a busy part of the city, is fast becoming an eyesore.

The nondescript whitewashed building atop a hill, surrounded by several layers of high security fences and barbed wire, makes a poor view for guests staying in the Borneo Hotel across the road.

Prisons officials had put up a barricade to keep prying eyes out, as a road-widening project has brought the perimeter fencing next to the road.