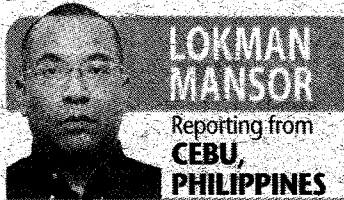


PM: Prioritise growth areas for biggest impact

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MALAYSIA has proposed that Asean prioritise projects within two growth areas in the region to derive maximum benefits fast, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The two growth areas are the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) and the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA).

"Since there are so many projects involved, there is a need to prioritise, because not all projects can be implemented at once.

"The main ones should be those with the biggest impact," the prime minister said at a Press conference for the Malaysian media yesterday.

Abdullah and his counterparts had earlier attended IMT-GT and BIMP-EAGA Summits, part of the 12th Asean Summit being held here until Monday.

"Transportation should be a priority, be it by air, land or sea.

"Telecommunications services and infrastructure such as roads are also important," Abdullah said.

He said tourism-related projects could be expedited as they did not need large capital investments.

Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand could, for example, conduct joint promotion of the area as a single tourist destination.

To help develop small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the region, Malaysia will host a convention and exhibition for SMEs from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in Penang by year-end.

"We hope this event will enhance co-operation between the private sectors of the three countries," Abdullah added.

BIMP-EAGA, meanwhile, en-



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi listening to the keynote address of Philippine President Gloria Arroyo (second from right) at the Asean Heads of State/Government meeting with the Eminent Persons Group at the Cebu International Convention Centre yesterday. Others (from left) are Indonesian President Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Prime Minister of Laos Bouasone Bouphavanh and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. — Bernama picture

compasses large, fertile land that can be used to plant oil palm and could potentially lead to more co-operation in the biofuel industry.

Customs and immigration problems also need to be resolved to encourage more cross border trade and business, the prime minister said, calling for procedures to be simplified further.

He said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar would head a committee that oversees the implementation of various government and private sector projects under the development road-map for these growth areas.

"They will determine the

specifics, such as which projects to implement and the cost involved.

"We will expect an update on their progress at the next IMT-GT and BIMP-EAGA Summits (in December)," Abdullah added.

Meanwhile, asked to comment on US President George Bush's plan to send another 21,500 troops to Iraq to help combat civil unrest, the prime minister said Malaysia opposed the move.

"The US approach of using military force as a solution is wrong and cannot be condoned.

"They think it will solve the problem but instead it makes the situation worse," he said.

Abdullah said sending more troops to Iraq would only create more anger and opposition, including from within the US itself.

Bush's move has already drawn strong criticism from both Republicans and Democrats.

"America appears to be stubborn and not taking into consideration all this opposition. They push ahead regardless," he said.

Asked what the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) can do, Abdullah, who is also OIC chairman, said: "We can only oppose. But we all know that despite the opposition, they will still go ahead."