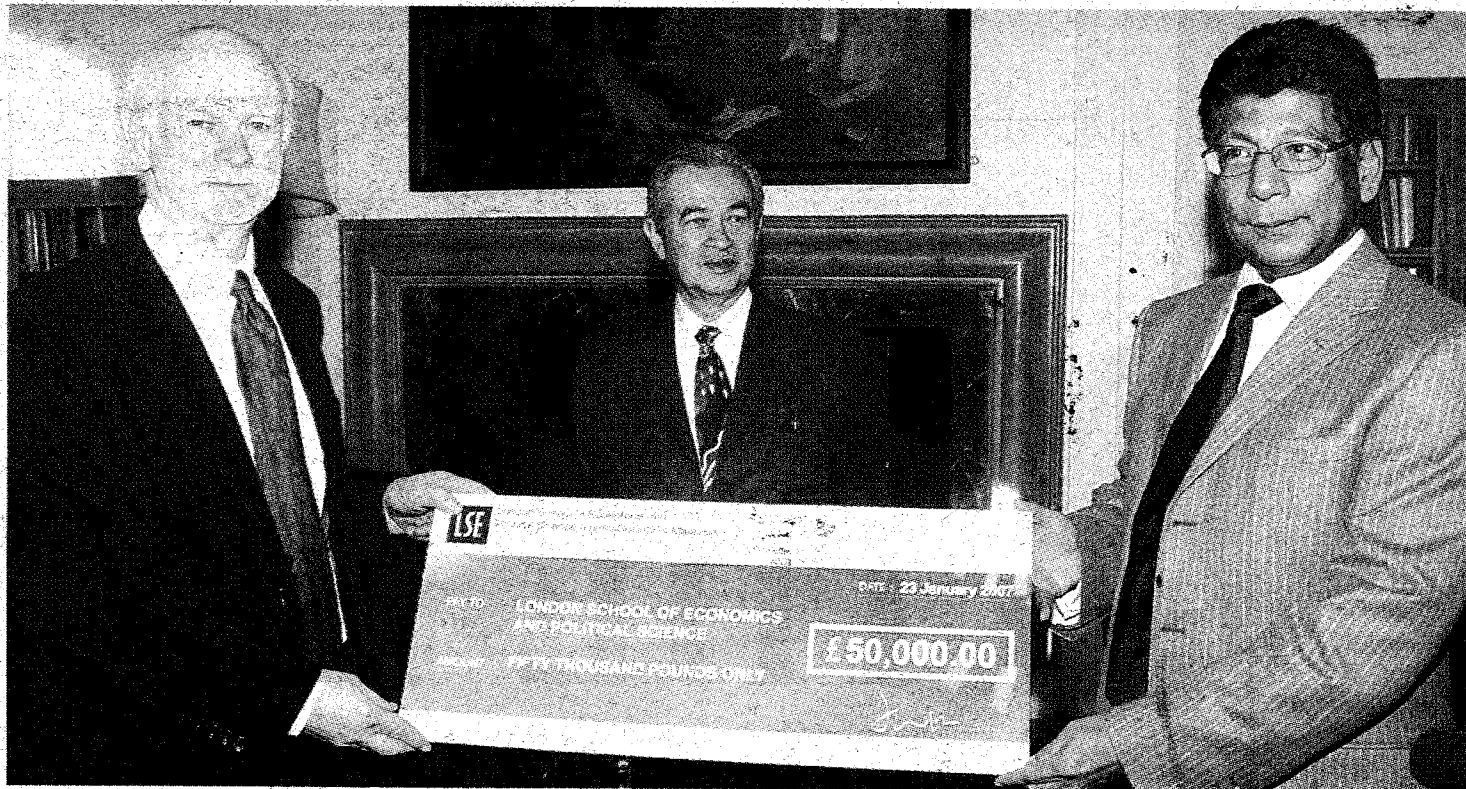


Abdullah: I will carry on as there is still much to do

NST- 25/1/2007



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi witnessing the handing over of a mock cheque for £50,000 (RM350,000) by Datuk Dr Munir Majid to London School of Economics director Sir Howard Davies for the setting up of a Malaysia Room at the university, on Tuesday. Munir is president of the Malaysian alumni of the university.

■ **By M.K. Megan**
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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says he would like to contest again in the next general election as he still has the appetite to run the country as prime minister.

"Yes, I think so. I will continue to run the country in the capacity of prime minister as there is still a lot of work to be done," he said in an interview on BBC's *Special Edition of Asia Today* on Astro, which was aired live from London at 9.30am (Malaysian time) yesterday.

He was asked by host Zeinab Badawi whether he still had the appetite for the job and whether he would run again in the next election.

The prime minister was the special guest of the programme held at his Dorchester Hotel suite.

Abdullah stopped in London on his way to attend the four-day World Economic Forum which began yesterday in Davos, Switzerland.

Asked to comment on his strained ties with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who had been criticising the government's policy under his leadership, Abdullah said the former prime minister had the

right to say whatever he wanted.

"It is his right to say what he wants.

"I have a government to run. I have to do what I think is possible to do.

"The economy is better now and the Ninth Malaysia Plan has been launched in March last year and it is gathering momentum.

"Maybe because we are a bit slow, that's why he (Dr Mahathir) was impatient," said Abdullah in the 10-minute interview.

Abdullah, being the chair of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, was also asked to comment on the role of the organisation in conflicts involving Muslims.

The prime minister said: "What we are doing is giving the OIC an economic face. OIC has been dealing with politics too much.

"But we must do something that will help the poor ... do something that will help reduce illegal trade ... do something to help the OIC countries. We must also develop the capacity of these countries to get economic help."

On ways to address the situation where the Western and Muslim worlds were demonising each other, Abdullah, while agreeing with the situation, added that people had to have a better understand-

ing of Islam.

"I have been promoting Islam everywhere I go.

"It's best to create a better understanding and we must continue to talk about it.

"We certainly have to provide them with an alternative in the sense the ability to say what Islam is and what Islam wants us to do and to prove that Islam is not against modernity, to prove that Islam is still relevant today."

He said he had been promoting Islam Hadhari, a civilisational Islamic approach initiated by him, which had been receiving good response from both the Muslim and Western worlds.

Abdullah said Malaysia had been practising moderate Islam by not marginalising the non-Muslims, bringing them into the power-sharing government and permitting the freedom of worship.

"As far as we're concerned, we are committed to freedom of worship.

"People are free to practise their religion. We are also committed to power-sharing between Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims."

On another topic, Abdullah said Islam would not tolerate or compromise on terrorism. "Well, I

have been saying that very often. I've been saying zero-tolerance for terrorism. We have acted fast and have even arrested Jemaah Islamiyah members in Malaysia."

He said after Sept 11, US President George W. Bush declared "war on terror" and everyone supported it.

"We thought that the incident was something that should not have happened. After that, what happened?"

"He (Bush) had other game plans.

"He attacked Iraq, Afghanistan and his policy in the Middle East always favours Israel. The Muslims know it very well ... it's obvious. This has angered Muslims and created a lot of unhappiness."

He pointed out that the problems faced by Muslims must be solved by Muslims themselves and not by the West.

Abdullah said the problem in Iraq was difficult to resolve. "I spoke to Bush and he said there will be a civil war and a bloodbath if US left Iraq. This is all the responsibility of the government of prime minister Nouri Maliki. I've been saying that the American government must leave. Muslims must settle their own problems. The OIC can play a role in that."