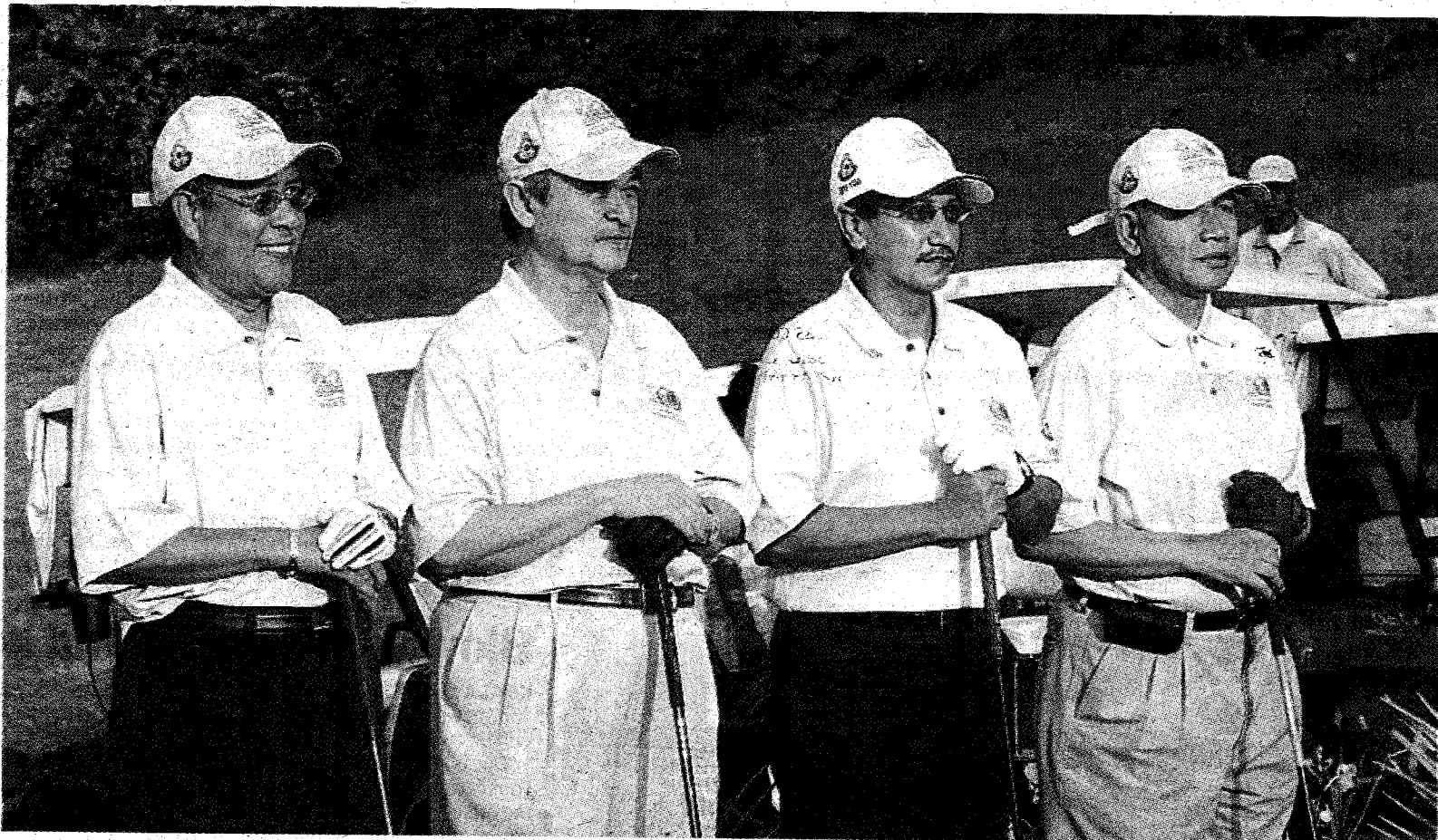


PM: Time's not ripe yet



One for the album: Seri Paduka Baginda Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Al-Wathiqu Billah Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Mahmud Al-Muktafi Billah Shah (second from right) and Abdullah (second from left) at a golf tournament held in conjunction with Police Day in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With them are Internal Security Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof (left) and Deputy IGP Datuk Mohd Najib Abd Aziz. — Bernama

The Star - 25/3/2007

Good growth alone no reason to hold polls

KUALA LUMPUR: Good economic growth is not a "good enough" reason to call for an early general election, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The Prime Minister said Malaysians were benefiting from the country's economic growth but he had to give due consideration to other factors as well before calling for an election.

They include fulfilling promises in the Barisan Nasional manifesto for the 2004 elections, Abdullah said in a 30-minute interview with CNBC Asia, which was telecast at 11.30am yesterday.

"I must assume that Malaysians want me to fulfil my promises, and I have some more to do. Of course, we want to make sure that the development is felt by the people. I suppose economy alone is not enough.

"I must make sure that the party is ready and everyone is geared for campaigning. It is never one factor to call for an election," he said.

Interviewer Martin Soong also asked Abdullah when Malaysia would be ready to allow the ringgit to trade offshore, considering that the currency has gained value significantly.

The Prime Minister said: "At the moment, we are not ready for such a policy.

"The ringgit can still become stronger. Its strength is very important, as it affects confidence in the economy.

"I would not want to see a yo-yo situation. It is not good," he said, adding that he was happy that the ringgit was not a target for speculation.

He hoped the ringgit would gain strength gradually and consistently, rather than suddenly increasing and dropping in value since it could lead to other problems.

On the ongoing talks between Proton Holdings Bhd and Volkswagen AG, Abdullah said if the Government could work on a partnership or joint venture, it could enhance the growth of Proton in terms of technology development.

This, hopefully, would make the carmaker more competitive, he said.

However, he added: "We would like Proton to remain Proton.

"They cannot decide to forget the name

»The ringgit can still become stronger«

DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

Proton and allow it to disappear. Proton is the pride of the country."

On his tiff with predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed (who allegedly thought Abdullah's approach of an open government is regressive), the Prime Minister said:

"I have to think of the best method and strategy to adopt to get the Ninth Malaysia Plan implemented.

"Inflation is low, deficit is coming down and growth level is being maintained at a satisfactory level.

"There is improvement and that means we are not static."

Asked if enough had been done over the past 25 years in terms of distribution of growth for bumiputras, Abdullah said only 18% (of the targeted 30%) had been achieved.

While he called for greater participation, he said the Government was careful to ensure that it was not against the interest of non-Malays.

To a suggestion that his momentum against corruption had slowed down, Abdullah said the allegation was unfair.

He said he had carried out many preventive measures and programmes.

They include the setting up of the Institute of Integrity, appointing 300 investigators who operate independently from the police and appointing forensic auditors to investigate white-collar crimes.

On the Employees Provident Fund's takeover of the RHB banking group, Abdullah said it was a "good investment for the EPF and the contributors."

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