

PM: No meddling by S'pore

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Abdullah tells Johoreans not to worry about IDR project

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TOKYO: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has brushed aside fears expressed by some quarters of Singapore meddling in the development of the Iskandar Development Region (IDR).

He said the fears arose after Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong inadvertently used the word consultative committee at a press conference in Langkawi last week.

Abdullah and Lee had agreed to set up a special ministerial committee to discuss areas of co-operation including the usage of smartcard for easier travel between IDR and Singapore and the promotion of tourism.

A minister will be appointed from each country to sit on the committee.

"That (Lee's announcement) was a mistake, a slip of the tongue. I have clarified the matter," he said in reply to a question by a Singapore journalist who had asked him to comment on reports that Johoreans were fearful of Singapore's involvement in the project during the 13th Nikkei Conference here yesterday.

After that announcement, Abdullah said, the people of Johor were worried that it would mean that any decision that needed to be made with regards to the IDR would have to be referred to Sin-

gapore for approval.

"But that is not correct. That will never happen," he added.

Replying to another question, Abdullah said the threat of terrorism arising from religious conflicts, while well under control, was high on the list of the most pressing security concern facing the region at the moment.

"We are concerned about these developments and we have to address this problem by getting down to the root causes. If we talk about Mindanao and southern Thailand, which have begun to be associated with terrorism, we will see that they are very poor and without any economic capacity.

"I am not running down any government, but these areas need help. We are co-operating among Asean countries to overcome the problem so as to reduce the conflict," he added.

Earlier in his keynote address, Abdullah said that the Asean+3 (Asean countries plus Japan, China and South Korea) process was the best approach in building a true East Asian Community which was peaceful, prosperous and progressive.

However, Abdullah said that this did not mean that other regional co-operation processes like the East Asia Summit or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation were less important, only that they served different purposes.



Leadership role: Abdullah listening to a speech before addressing the conference in Tokyo. — Bernama