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PM assures equal focus on Sabah and Sarawak

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KUCHING: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi thanked the people of Sarawak and Sabah for uniting in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Merdeka on Aug 31, although the two states only attained independence from Britain on Sept 16, 1963 and then joined the federation to form Malaysia.

"I must thank the people of Sarawak and Sabah for their spirit of togetherness. The people in Sarawak strongly feel and understand the spirit of Merdeka.

"Even though we know that Sarawak and Sabah did not attain their independence in 1957 but in 1963, we accept both states with equal status and accord equal focus in our quest to develop our country.

"I am sure the people in Sarawak and Sabah would agree that there has been great development in every field since the formation of Malaysia in 1963. I assure you that the government gives equal focus to all in this country," Abdullah told a crowd of more than 35,000 at the state stadium here.

At the Malaysia Merdeka celebrations, attended by Yang di-Per-tuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah, Abdullah said the eventual introduction of a



Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin (centre), joined by (from left) Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim, Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abang Muhammad Salahuddin Abang Barieng (partly hidden) and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, touching a crystal ball to mark the launching of the Malaysia Merdeka celebrations at the State Stadium in Kuching last night.

development corridor in Sarawak would bring opportunities to the people, particularly the younger generation.

"Our module of development would cover every field but human capital development is our prime focus because we want to make sure that our younger generation is prepared to face future challenges with confidence.

"I am sure our younger generation would be a united force with the capabilities to take our beloved nation to greater heights."

The prime minister, who ar-

rived from Sydney after attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting, said the world leaders he met during the gathering were elated with Malaysia's success since gaining independence from Britain.

"We must keep this tradition of working together as a family intact."

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, in a speech earlier, said the Malaysia Merdeka celebrations marked the victory of leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman who had the vision of a united

Malaysia.

"Sarawak is lucky to be part of Malaysia and to be enjoying the fruits of development brought about by a caring government."

Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abang Muhammad Salahuddin Abang Barieng, who celebrated his 86th birthday yesterday, was also present at the ceremony.

There were performances by Annuar Zain, Dayang Nurfaezah, Mawi, Milla of AF5 fame and Azarina.

There were also cultural dances and patriotic songs.