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Abdullah condemns illegal Hindraf rally

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YAN: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi condemned the action of the Hindu Rights Action Force in organising an illegal assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, saying it was an attempt to raise fear in the people and disrupt the general election.

He said the group did not respect the process of democracy because by creating trouble they would scare off the people from coming out to vote.

"The business community, too, would be affected and, like the majority of people, does not support such behaviour because this is not the Malaysian way," he said after launching a project to upgrade a road under the Northern Corridor Economic Region here.

"The country has prospered not because of demands made through illegal demonstrations.

"Everything we do is for the people and we meet their needs and this is what they want.

"This is also the way we have been developing the country and this is what is meant by stability for the growth of the people and nation."

Abdullah is on a one-day visit to Kedah, the first state he is visiting after the dissolution of parliament on Wednesday to pave the way for the general election on March 8.

In yesterday's incident, police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse several hundred Hindraf supporters who gathered in the city centre.

About 160 people, including one on the police wanted list, were arrested but most were released after their particulars were taken. Nine, including one woman, all aged between 35 and 40, were remanded for repeated-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi mingling with residents of Pondok Haji Ahmad after handing keys to a new building at Kampung Kepala Bukit, Bukit Pinang, yesterday. — NST picture by Shahrizal Md Noor

ly defying police orders to disperse.

One policeman was injured.

The prime minister said action would also be taken against those who caused chaos during campaigning.

He said the authorities had an obligation to the peace-loving majority to prevent any disruption to the conduct of the polls.

"We have just dissolved parliament and are making preparations for the general election.

"If actions are detrimental to security and affect the smooth process of the election, we will definitely take action."

Asked if he would allow Umno Youth deputy chief Khairy Jamaluddin, who is on the list of potential candidates for Negri Sem-

bilan and tipped to contest the Rembau parliamentary seat, to contest in the general election, Abdullah said he had yet to discuss the candidate list from the respective state BN chairmen or leaders of the various BN component parties.

Asked on the strong performance of the ringgit which hit a 10-year high against the US dollar, Abdullah, who is also Finance Minister, said this proved the strength of Malaysia's economy.

"We hope the nation's strength and stability would continue to draw more investors and improve our relationship with other countries in fields besides the economy," he said.

Earlier, Abdullah said the government would continue to help

the people with the difficulties caused by spiralling prices of goods globally.

"In fact, we have never stopped providing for the people although the rising prices have caused us to carry out more development programmes.

"We are a caring government just as we want the people to be caring citizens."

Abdullah later launched the RM158 million upgrading project which involved 525km of roads in padi fields under Mada in Perlis and Kedah.

He also witnessed a RM10.4 million cheque presentation by state secretary Datuk Syed Unan Mashri Syed Abdullah to more than 30 farmers' organisations in Mada who were affected by the floods last year.