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Projects won't be sacrificed

Government has people's interests at heart, says Abdullah

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PRIME MINISTER Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took the first question in the new Parliament by assuring the rakyat that the Government still had their interests at heart despite the rising cost of fuel and food prices.

Abdullah said the Government would not sacrifice "people-centred projects" that had been lined up under the 9th Malaysia Plan, even if the Government should run short of the 9MP allocation.

"This has been decided in the mid-term review of the 9MP meeting.

"The decision is that the projects have to be scaled down in terms of allocation or postponed. We have to make sure that those related to the well-being of the people are not sacrificed.

"This is necessary because the original allocation for the plan had been calculated when the price of oil was well below the current market," he told Razali Ibrahim (BN - Muar).

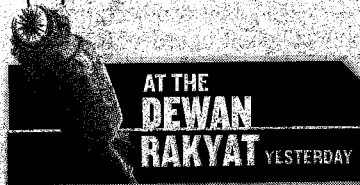
"These projects will have to be implemented to enhance the quality of life," he said, adding that this concerned those projects targeting development and infrastructure in rural areas such as that in Sabah and Sarawak, as well as urban poor pockets.

Abdullah said the Government had put aside a RM4bil allocation to counter the rising world food prices and ensure there was enough supply for Malaysians.

Razali had wanted to know the Government's measures in improving the quality of life and purchasing power of Malaysians, public security and racial integration.

Abdullah said the rising costs of fuel to over US\$100 (RM315.87) per barrel had directly impacted the costs of projects under the 9MP.

On the question of racial integration, Abdullah said the portfolio on unity had



been moved to the then Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry so that there would be more focus from the Government on this issue.

Abdullah also said the Government planned to recruit retired police officers or offer those retiring contracts to serve. Later, Abdullah, replying to a question by Lim Guan Eng (DAP - Bagan), said the country's practice of tendering did not mean that the Government condones corruption.

Abdullah, in his capacity as Finance Minister, said Malaysia had its own approach and system in tendering projects.

He added that the Government did not need to follow the system by developed countries just to cast an uncorrupted perception of the country.

"I know that the existing perception accuses the Government of corruption but that is only a perception. Our tender system does not mean we practise or encourage corruption.

"If we want to follow international standards, which is to have all open tenders, then it will create a problem to our local companies that cannot compete with international companies," he said.

Earlier, when replying to a question from Opposition Leader Datu Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (PKR - Permatang Pauh), Abdullah said under the 9MP, RM153bil of projects had been approved, of which RM63bil or 38% were under direct negotiation and the rest by tenders.