



GETTING READY: Workers looking at a giant banner of Abdullah which they had just put up along the main road leading to Senawang Industrial Park near Seremban yesterday.

Pak Lah shows he's in tune with the people

IF the hundreds of youths taking part in the Rakan Muda Masuk Kampung programme at Kampung Air Melintas near Kepala Batas on Saturday are voters, Barisan Nasional can be assured of every single one of their votes and that of their foster parents.

With only two songs - *Jalur Gemilang* and *Kerana Mu Malaysia* - Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi managed to get the undivided attention of the participants and the audience for the two hours that he was in the village.

Abdullah also put many federal and state leaders to shame when he sang the songs together with the youths without stumbling over the lyrics when many others could only pretend and mumble. The best that some of them could do was to sing the chorus.

Waving a miniature *Jalur Gemilang*, Abdullah belted out the songs with gusto together with the participants at the start of the programme, forcing other leaders on the VIP stage to try to follow suit.

"Wah, dia boleh nyanyilah (Wow, he can sing)," said one elderly lady in awe when Abdullah moved from the centre of the stage towards the microphone followed by other leaders to sing the second song, *Kerana Mu Malaysia*, after scoring full marks for *Jalur Gemilang*.

Such personal touches that he has shown in Penang may be Abdullah's greatest strength in helming the Barisan campaign. The village function was part of the Rakan Muda programme to introduce urban youths to the kampung life.

On his first visit to his home state since the dissolution of the Parliament, Abdullah had packed his one-day trip with

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has begun his nationwide tour to look at the preparedness of the Barisan Nasional machinery on the ground as well as to rally the forces. SA'ODAH ELIAS, who is following the coalition chief, reports.



three programmes, both on the mainland and the island.

Still, despite his punishing schedule, he managed to steal some time to accompany his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, to visit the grave of his mother, Datuk Kailan Hassan.

Endon had missed Kailan's funeral last month as she only came back to the country last Wednesday after undergoing follow-up treatment for breast cancer in the United States.

Of Abdullah's three engagements in Penang, two involved students and youths. During these sessions, he effortlessly doffed his premier hat to assume the demeanour of a father and peppered his speeches with advice on the importance of education.

Considering the election fever that is gripping the country, many had expected Abdullah to at least say something about the opposition, but not once did he do so or broach any negative issue.

That, according to his aide, would be the basis of Barisan's campaign this time.

"The boss is very emphatic

on what he wants the Barisan campaign to be like. His directive to Barisan leaders, especially to Umno, was to talk only about development and to explain to the people what we had done and planned to do.

"He is also very clear on what he does not want Barisan leaders to do - not to attack any party or any individual in their speeches. He is showing them by example when he did not even deign to dignify Hadi Awang's (PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang) statement questioning the Barisan chief's piousness with an answer," the aide said.

Still, he said, this would not mean that Umno would not touch on religious issues when campaigning, though it would only be limited to explaining to the people about certain issues and not to use it to criticise the other side regardless how provocative PAS got.

Yesterday was also a full working day for Abdullah. In the morning he was in Malacca to launch the Barisan election machinery and the Federation of Peninsula Malay Students Foundation, and in the evening he was back in Penang to officially open a Universiti Teknologi Mara branch.

Today, he will be in Negri Sembilan and tomorrow in Selangor, followed by a trip to Perlis in the evening.

Abdullah seemed to be able to take all the travelling around in his stride but the many speeches that he had given is beginning to take a toll on his voice. He is getting huskier by the day.