

Abdullah: Dr M free to say anything

thestar - 9/6/2008

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SANDAKAN: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has said that his predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was free to say whatever he wants.

"Tun is free to say anything and this is not a problem for me. We are a democratic nation," the Prime Minister told reporters who asked him about the scathing attack on his administration by Dr Mahathir on Wednesday.

Abdullah said his priority was on fulfilling the mandate given by Malaysians during the general election to the Barisan Nasional administration under his leadership.

He said he took over the reigns of the Government about two-and-a-half-years ago when he became Prime Minister in 2003 and had just completed preparing the Ninth Malaysia Plan to meet the promises of the Barisan manifesto.

"I don't want to implement projects on an *ad hoc* and

piecemeal basis. We have to see development in totality and lead the country towards Vision 2020," Abdullah said after a ceremony to hand over keys to owners of the Taman Mesra low cost flats here yesterday.

Pointing out that development had to be carried out in stages, Abdullah said the Ninth Malaysia Plan was only the first step and that it would be followed by the 10th and 11th plans.

"Our aim is to realise our national mission and in this matter, implementation is a vital factor. People always complain about this. They make a lot of noise about the delivery of public services," he added.

"We have to rectify this. If the matter is of utmost importance, we will have to concentrate on it."

He said what was important now was that the Federal and state governments work closely in developing the country and helping the *rakyat* in implementing all the identi-

fied programmes.

"That is my duty," said Abdullah, who was his usual smiling self as he declined to take further questions on Dr Mahathir's attack against him.

"*Sudah lah, cukup lah... apa lain ada?*" (Enough, enough ... do you have other questions?)," he said, adding that he had suspected that the earlier questions regarding his visit to Deramakot forest reserve was merely a decoy.

When a reporter remarked that both the forestry issue and Dr Mahathir's statements were of interest to the media, Abdullah replied: "Are you sure? Thank you."

Abdullah arrived in this east coast town at 10am yesterday and flew in a helicopter to the Deramakot forest reserve where he was briefed on sustainable forest management.

Accompanied by Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman and his state Cabinet members, Abdullah also attended a meet-the-people dinner at Yu Yuan Secondary School hall.