

'Govt focused on developing south Johor'

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday shrugged off comments made by the Sultan of Johor and said the government is focused on developing south Johor.

The Sultan, who spoke at the launch of the Iskandar Development Region, had called for the Causeway to be torn down as it was a vestige of colonialism.

Abdullah said the Causeway would remain.

"At present, we have to use the Causeway. Our programme now is to focus on efforts to develop South Johor with quality development. This area could be a catalyst to develop the economy."

Abdullah was speaking to the Malaysian media at a Press conference here. He is in Pakistan for trade talks as well as to attend the second World Islamic Economic Forum, an initiative under the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Abdullah is currently chairman of the OIC.

In Singapore, Bernama reported that the Singapore Foreign Ministry had described as "curious" the remark by the Sultan of Johor.

A ministry spokesman said in a Channel NewsAsia (CNA) report that Singapore did not believe the call represented the Malaysian government's position.

Sultan Iskandar caused a stir at the launch of the multi-billion ringgit south Johor economic corridor project at Danga Bay when he said in an off-the-cuff speech that the causeway should be demolished.

"Causeway tu, bukakan... baru negeri Johor ni maju (the causeway has to be demolished, only then Johor will develop)," the Sultan said before launching the project which was telecast over RTM.

CNA had also asked Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar for his reaction on the Sultan's call.

Syed Hamid said: "I think the most important thing is for us to put the speech and comment in its proper context."

"We must always learn from the lessons of the past and make sure whatever development we are going to undertake will bring benefit to our well-being, for the good of our people."