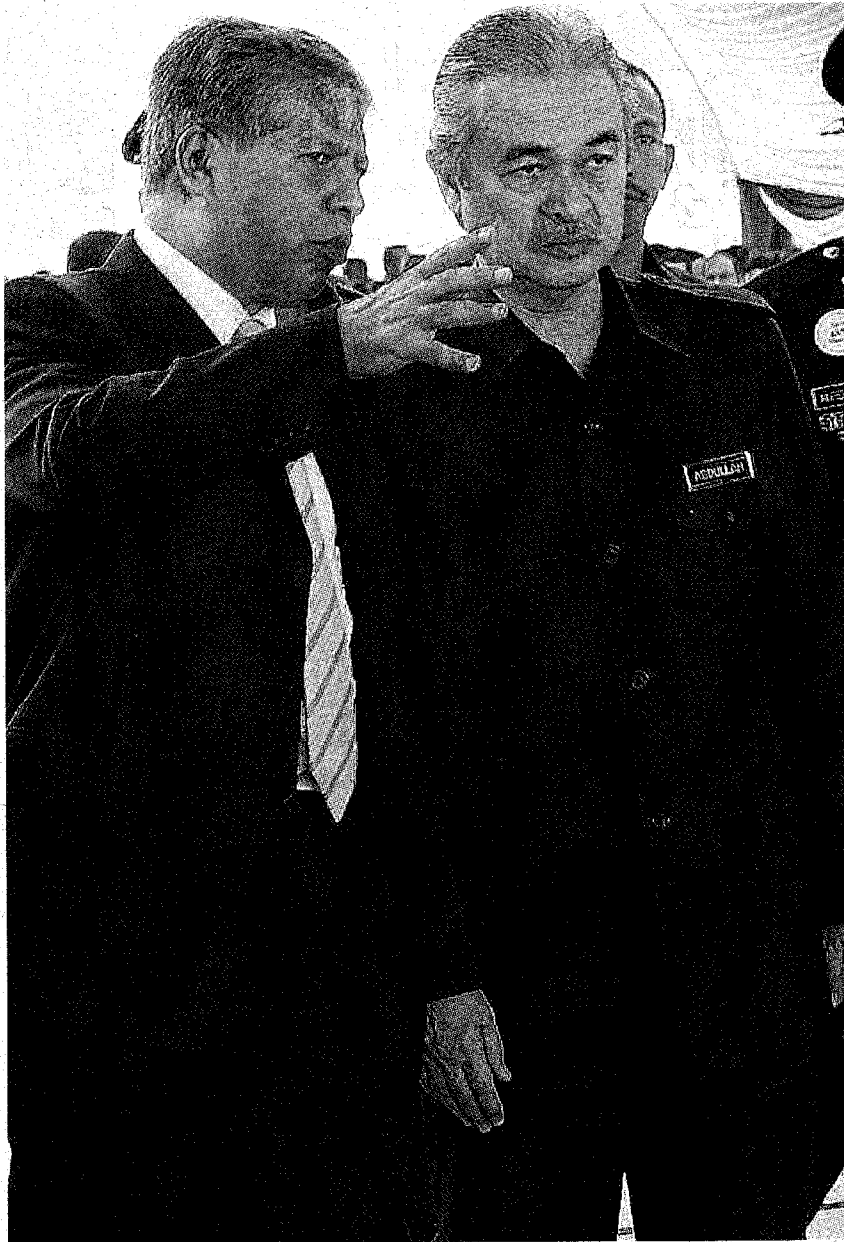


'I AM THE PRIME MINISTER'



Abdullah being briefed by Senai Airport Terminal Services chief executive officer Datuk Sidik Shaik Osman (left), after launching the cargo terminal.

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JOHOR BARU: The Prime Minister yesterday signalled that he was not prepared to revive the aborted bridge project and buy Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's silence.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that the decision on the matter had been reached by the Cabinet after much discussion. Responding to the former prime minister's offer to stop his attacks if the bridge was built, he retorted:

"Never mind, he can say anything he wants. I am the Prime Minister. I have a job to do. I decide what is best for the people," he told reporters after launching MSC Malaysia Cyberport here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who has been making scathing attacks on the Abdullah administration for several months, said on Sunday that he would stop his criticisms if the Government resumed construction of the half-bridge.

Abdullah said in his closed-door meeting with Johor Umno leaders yesterday, he had also stressed the need to put the bridge issue behind and move forward to focus on the new growth corridor being developed in South Johor.

"Yes, we discussed the mat-

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Yes, we (Johor Umno leaders) discussed the matter (bridge). It has now been put to rest. It is no more an issue.

Abdullah

ter (bridge). It has now been put to rest. It is no more an issue," he said.

The Prime Minister also stressed that work on the new Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex would be accelerated to ease the traffic bottleneck at the existing checkpoint here.

The RM1.3 billion CIQ was targeted to be fully operational by next year, but work on the project is reportedly behind schedule.

A new RM250 million permanent flyover linking the Causeway to the CIQ is now being planned, but construction has yet to begin.

Abdullah said he had directed the Works Ministry to "hurry up", saying there was a dire

need to speed things up as the CIQ was almost completed.

The contractor for the project is Gerbang Perdana Sdn Bhd.

On the development of the South Johor Economic Region, he said this was a massive initiative designed to propel Johor to success.

An integral component of this plan, he added, was the Senai Airport which is positioning itself as a major regional player in air passenger and cargo traffic.

However, Abdullah said it was not enough to just build the latest and most sophisticated infrastructure.

"We must find the right experts to handle and manage these facilities efficiently," he said.