

It's not about doing what's popular, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Doing the right thing means much more to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi than doing the popular thing.

The Prime Minister said he was sometimes asked why he did not just spend and build and get the construction sector going by ditching out government projects.

"I am told that this will be popular and will grease the wheels of our economy. I am not averse to spending. The Ninth Malaysia Plan proves that.

"But if my economic policy is only about 'tax and spend' without any thought given to structural changes, what will I leave for future generations?

"I don't want to leave behind a debt burden or contingent liabilities. I don't want us to succeed today so that future generations have to pick up the tab," he said at a Kuala Lumpur Business Club dinner yesterday.

He stressed that he had not set out to do what was popular but to do what was right for the country, and not just for this generation but also for those who would follow.

"All politicians want to be popu-

lar. But popularity must not come ahead of doing the right thing. I have not set out to do what is popular.

"Never mind that I may not build great monuments or glittering cities. What is important to me is that what we do today, what we change today, will enable us to succeed now and far into the future," he said.

"Let us be bold and seize the opportunity before us and move full steam ahead," he added.

On the 9MP, he said, with so many authorities involved, implementation could be a bureaucratic nightmare.

However, he would ensure proper monitoring based on the objectives and implementation based on set time-lines.

"We cannot afford delays and leakages. Only the best will be awarded contracts.

"Any gross negligence or dereliction of duty, including unconscionable sub-standard work and delays such as that at the new Kuching prison project I visited last week, will be investigated and legal action taken where neces-

sary," he said.

He said the success of the 9MP would determine whether Malaysia could achieve its goal of becoming fully developed by 2020.

"We are at the halfway stage of Vision 2020 but not quite halfway there.

"With everything that is happening in the world, like escalating oil prices, the rise of China and India, and a continued global macroeconomic imbalance, the next five years will probably determine whether we will make it.

"That is why the Ninth Malaysia Plan is critical. If we falter, we will not make it," he said.

Abdullah said he believed the 9MP had been well received but admitted that many still had misgivings about the implementation.

"I could not agree with you more. Poor implementation has always been our undoing. It has so often frustrated our best intentions and most innovative suggestions. But I will not allow it to frustrate us at this crucial time," he said.

He said the 9MP must neither be

dismissed as sloganeering nor viewed as just another five-year plan.

"The national mission must drive home the point that this may be our only opportunity to safeguard our future. The sense of purpose and urgency that it has created is not without basis," he said.

Abdullah said his openness policy had created a new situation in the country where even backbenchers in Parliament now had no qualms about criticising the Government.

"This is what openness is all about; everybody says what they want. I tell my ministers that they should not be upset with the various criticisms directed at them and their ministries.

"It is better to know. It is dangerous if you don't know because it might explode right in your face," he said.

The Prime Minister said during a question-and-answer session with the audience that it did not bother him that some people had interpreted his openness as a sign of weakness.