

Pak Lah assures Japan on policies

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TOKYO: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has assured Japan that he will continue with all existing domestic and foreign policies, asserting at the same time that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020 is also his vision.

The Deputy Prime Minister said that although Malaysia, like Japan, would have to change and reinvent itself many times over in the decades to come, it would be made within the flow of continuity of the past generation.

"Let me make it very clear that I intend to continue with the domestic, economic, political, social and cultural policies that have been well established by Dr Mahathir and deeply institutionalised by Malaysia.

"Let me make it equally clear that I will also continue the foreign policies that are similarly embedded in our establishment and national institutions," he told about 200 leading Japanese and 150 Malaysian corporate leaders and government leaders.

"I will continue these foreign policies that are very anchored in logic, and so strongly propelled by common sense," Abdullah said in his keynote address at the business forum organised by Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies and Japan External Trade Organisation.

Held in conjunction with Abdullah's three-day official visit to Japan, the one-day Continuity, Change and Co-operation: Malaysia and Japan Working Together forum was much awaited by the Japanese business community who wanted to hear from Abdullah himself on the impending change in the Malaysian government leadership.

He also assured Japan that the change of premiership in November would not alter the Government, adding that there would be no regime change.

He said that although Dr Mahathir would no longer be at the helm, the Barisan Nasional would remain in power as it had been for the past 45 years.

"There will be no change in the laws, administrative system, key tech-

nocrats, political culture, economic system and basic circumstances.

"Our (the Malaysian Government's) passions, priorities and aspirations will not change," he said.

Abdullah said this included the Look East Policy, implemented by Dr Mahathir in 1981, which had placed the Malaysia-Japan relationship on solid ground.

"I believe that Malaysia must continue to Look East in the years and decades to come," he said.

Having learnt so much from Japan's successes and failures and how it managed them, Abdullah said that Japan would continue to be a model for balancing social traditionalism and modernity, "even as Malaysia continues to be a model for balancing religious traditionalism and modernity, at least in the Muslim world."

On Vision 2020, he said it was not only to turn Malaysia into a fully developed economy by that year but

"also to build a prosperous society with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient."

Paying tribute to Dr Mahathir, he said the Prime Minister was one of the best men that Malaysia had produced over the last 500 years, saying: "It (Dr Mahathir's leadership) will be a very difficult act to follow."

"Questions naturally arise when a great man who has presided over the affairs of a nation for so long decides to hand over the reins of government and leadership to his successor.

"Many have asked in recent months, and many will ask in the months to come, who is this Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, what will he be like as Prime Minister and what changes will he make?" he said.

He said that while he could answer the last question, "the Asian values in us" made it difficult for him to talk about himself, adding that it was for others to discuss.