

# 'Dr M not likely to change his mind'

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TOKYO: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi does not see Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad changing his mind about retiring in October as announced.

The Deputy Prime Minister said Dr Mahathir had made his views known to the country as well as international audiences, including Japan, during his visit last month.

"He has made a commitment and has asked me to succeed him. He does not talk to me about these things (decision about retiring) and I don't talk to him about it either.

"Only he knows (what he is going to do next)," Abdullah told about 80 Japanese journalists at a dialogue with the National Press Club here yesterday.

He was responding to a question from a local journalist who asked whether there was room for Dr Mahathir to change his mind.

To a question on Malaysia's relationship with the United States in the post-Sept 11 scenario, Abdullah said it was still good despite differences on certain specific issues.

"We are not anti-US or against the American people. Of course, we opposed its attack on Iraq in line with our stand (of non-interference), especially without the United Nations sanction.

"As far as I am concerned, I don't have a problem with the US. We have more agreements than disagreements with the US," he added.

Abdullah reiterated that being a sovereign and independent nation, Malaysia would voice out against anything that went against its interest.

"And we will do it without fear, just like our stand against the Iraq war. I think the democratic people of the US will understand this," he said.

On whether Malaysia was involved in the rebuilding of Iraq, the Deputy Prime Minister said there was no direct involvement at the moment.

"However, we provide humanitarian assistance. We have two medical teams helping the Iraqis there," he added.

On Malaysia's stand on Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi,

Abdullah said it was consistent with Asean's consensus that the military junta should release her without any delay.

"We hope Myanmar will listen to Asean's strong stand and free her immediately," he added.

Responding to a question on whether he would review the bumiputra preference policy, Abdullah said it was an important one for Malaysia's development and stability.

"However, I must stress that it does not discriminate against or deprive other communities. What we are doing is uplifting the bumiputras without bringing the others down. The slow ones need to catch up," he said.