

11 JUL 2003

Abdullah-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR COMMITTED TO HIS PLAN TO STEP DOWN, SAYS ABDULLAH

By: Hafizah Kamaruddin

TOKYO, July 11 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told a media gathering at the National Press Club of Japan today that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has committed himself to his plan to step down in October.

"Dr Mahathir has made the commitment (to step down). However, if there is any room for him to change his mind, it is him to decide and only he knows," Abdullah said in response to a Japanese reporter who asked whether there was a possibility of Dr Mahathir changing his mind over his plan to step down.

He was fielding questions from reporters representing the Kyodo News Agency, the Daily Yomiuri, the Asahi Shimbun, The Nikkei Weekly and Kompas, of Indonesia, covering international issues, bilateral relations between Japan and Malaysia and local issues, during the 90-minute gathering.

Abdullah arrived here yesterday for a three-day official visit to Japan at the invitation of the Japanese government.

It was Abdullah's first meeting with the Japanese and international press in Tokyo as Deputy Prime Minister, having had two meetings with them as Foreign Minister.

"He has made his decision and I accept it," said Abdullah who will be taking over the leadership of the country in November.

During the dialogue, Abdullah reiterated Malaysia's stand on issues relating to Malaysia-US relations after the Iraq war, the detention of Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the Japan-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement and the Asian Bond Market.

Abdullah said that Malaysia was not anti-American but disagreed with President George W. Bush's Administration to attack Iraq based on unilateral decision without getting the consent of the United Nations.

He said that as an independent country, Malaysia had the right to air her opinion and as a democratic country, the US would understand.

-- BERNAMA

HK AHH RM