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Business community seeks continuity

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MALAYSIAN and foreign businessmen see the Barisan Nasional easily winning the coming election, but want it to gain a convincing majority so it can effectively resolve the corporate sector's most pressing needs, build on the country's robust economic growth and boldly root out corruption.

The president of the Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry Malaysia (ACCIM), Tan Sri William Cheng, said a strong and stable Government would ensure continuation of a "pro-business and pro-development national agenda."

"In my opinion, a two-thirds majority would have a positive impact on the stability and strength of the new administration," he said.

"Armed with a strong mandate, the new administration would be able to carry out the promised changes more effectively and confidently."

Cheng noted that recent sweeping moves made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Government such as the curbing of corruption, improving the efficiency of the civil service, boosting public security, improving the effectiveness of the judiciary and improving ties with Singapore had helped create a conducive environment for businesses.

The Prime Minister will dissolve Parliament today, preparing the way for a general election by the end of the month.

Abdullah, who took over the reins of Government from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in October last year, is seeking a fresh mandate from the people to be able to effectively launch new policies and resolve age-old local problems.

The vice-chairman of the Malay Chamber of Commerce, Datuk Md Ramly Mohamad said continuity in the country's Government would keep the business community happy.

"Yes of course we want the BN to win.

"An assurance of political stability for the next five years would further boost confidence of the business community and drive investments," he added.

The business community also said it is keen to see that Malaysia creates a more competitive investment and business environment to meet the need for greater transparency and face the challenges of globalisation and national economic restructuring.

"There is a lot of hope," said Datuk Mohaiyani Shamsudin, managing director of Mohaiyani Securities of a victory for the Prime Minister's team.

American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) president Datuk Timothy Garland said the US business community in Malaysia was comfortable with the policies of the Prime Minister.

The chamber represents the interests of American businesses and investors in Malaysia.

"He has been quite clear (policy wise) for instance in handling corruption ... and investment decisions are based on whether a conducive environment is available," he said.

"There has been a very good relationship with the current administration ... We anticipate the BN would win and we expect the good relationship will continue," he added.

Ernest Z. Bower, president of the US Asean Business Council, said: "We would like to see Abdullah obtain a strong mandate from the Malaysian people to continue his outstanding work to strengthen the nation and the

economy.

"His early work to fight corruption and consolidate Malaysia's amazing growth over the last two decades is impressive, and sends a strong positive signal to investors," he added.

The Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI) said businesses wanted security, stability and an ability to get on with their work without the hindrance of unnecessary bureaucracy, corruption or inefficiency.

"There is some evidence that these issues are being noted by the Government but obstacles still exist and a radical improvement in the speed with which change is identified and effected is still needed," the MICCI's executive secretary Stewart J. Forbes said.

The new Government should be prepared to take calculated risks at both economic and social levels, continue its emphasis on stable and attractive monetary policies and fiscal regime to provide stability to businesses and new investors, he added.

The MICCI said liberalisation of the manufacturing and services industries and the development of a new breed of "thinking, independent, adaptable workers is needed for the future success of the nation."