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Abdullah: No unnecessary changes

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DEPUTY Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday that he would not change government policies "just for my name to be attached to them" when he takes over from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said, however, this did not preclude the possibility of implementing new policies if they were deemed necessary depending on circumstances in future.

Saying that it was still premature to make announcements about policies that he would be implementing on assuming the Prime Minister's post, he added all current policies would be continued as his ascension to the Prime Minister's post was not part of a change in regime.

He said the change only involved the leadership of Umno which meant that the new party leader would also be the Prime Minister.

"The change of leadership is not a change of regime. I will not change policies just for my name to be attached to them," he said after meeting Chinese President Hu Jintao.

He said this in reply to a question from the Chicago Tribune correspondent in Beijing who wanted to know what could be expected from Abdullah's administration when he takes over the leadership and issues he would be championing.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had implemented many good policies including that of Malaysia becoming a trade friendly nation, the Malaysia Incorporated concept and the transformation of the nation into an ideal location for foreign investment.

On his visit to China, he said it was an advantage as he prepared to assume the Prime Minister's post as he could understand the Chinese leadership's expectations of Malaysia.

"It was a chance for me to speak to the senior Chinese leadership including President Hu. I can hear them. I know their expectations."

He described his talks with Hu as productive, especially in terms of the latter's determination that bilateral trade should be given more priority.

Abdullah said he told Hu that his Prime Minister Wen Jiabao was confident of bilateral trade reaching RM78 billion next year, a figure that he was also comfortable with.

Asked by a Bloomberg correspondent of the biggest challenge he expected to face as Prime Minister, Abdullah said he wanted Malaysia to remain stable, peaceful and prosperous.

"I want to see all Malaysians enjoy an equitable share of the economic cake. So the cake must continue to grow."

Asked by the same journalist about who he would name as his deputy in Umno, he said he would decide when the time came.

On the failure of the World Trade Organisation talks in Cancun, he said this was due to the constant and furious battles between developing and developed nations on the rights of the former to a fair share.

He said developing countries had to protect their interests as there was wide divide between the two.

"I realise that we need to open our markets with liberalisation and globalisation. But the question is to what extent? It should not affect them politically and socially. Any country that suffers economically will also suffer politically."

To a question by the Voice of America correspondent on relations between Malaysia and the United States, Abdullah said they remained good with more

common points of understanding than differences.

"The US is aware that on matters of sovereignty or issues affecting our friends, we reserve the right to voice our views," he added.

Abdullah earlier witnessed the signing of 15 Memoranda of Understanding between Malaysian and Chinese businessmen.