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PM: We're ready for polls (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the coalition is prepared to face the general election, if it is called at any time now.

"The coalition is strong... but we want to make ourselves stronger. Though we have been in a state of preparedness for a long time, we are not satisfied and want to make ourselves more prepared," he said.

Without giving any indication when he would call for the dissolution of Parliament, Abdullah, who is the Prime Minister, said the coalition's priority was to get as many supporters and voters as possible.

Abdullah said this after chairing the BN supreme council meeting at Putra World Trade Centre.

BN component parties have been carrying out programmes and activities in preparation for the general election.

Today, the three movements in Umno - Wanita, Youth and Puteri - held a joint meeting on preparations.

On Sunday, Abdullah will address MIC leaders and members at the party's election machinery convention in Shah Alam.

Abdullah, who was also asked if the supreme council discussed seat allocations among the coalition, said the matter would be discussed "when the time comes".

On the possibility of swapping seats among the parties, he said they would consider it if necessary.

Abdullah said at today's meeting, BN component parties pledged their support for the Government's efforts to fight corruption.

"I have explained to the leaders the measures to eradicate corrupt practices.

"It is essential that we rid our Government of corruption... and I have been assured of the support of all those present," he said, adding that corruption was a disease that needed to be effectively rid of.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said that measures taken to curb corruption must be implemented speedily and effectively.

He said BN leaders had also pledged to prove their worthiness and the Government's capability to serve the people.

He said BN parties must portray a good image so that the people would have confidence in the coalition.

He said he had also taken the opportunity to explain the decisions and measures that the Government had adopted since he took over the premiership from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Abdullah said the supreme council also discussed the need for more emphasis on education to produce a knowledgeable and outstanding workforce.

He said the Government's aim was to boost intellectual capital among the younger generation to ensure Malaysia was able to produce a skilled workforce on a continuous basis in the interest of nation-building.

"Through education, unity among the younger generation will also be enhanced," added Abdullah.

On remarks by the Opposition that his decision not to name the Deputy Prime Minister and not to appoint another person as Finance Minister showed that he did not trust anybody, Abdullah said: "Let them say what they want. I will decide, it's my prerogative,".

Asked about the investigations of the Perwaja Steel Sdn Bhd, Abdullah

said he had asked the Attorney-General to update him on the progress.

On whether the Government would ask the A-G to speed up the investigations, he said: "Of course. I did not ask (A-G) to slow down (the investigations).

He said he did not give a deadline for the investigations to be completed.

Abdullah also said he had appointed Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik to head a committee to organise a dinner in honour of Dr Mahathir.

Dr Lim said the dinner would likely be held in January and was different from the one planned by the MCA to be held on Feb 1.