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I am ready to become Prime Minister, says Abdullah

Nik Imran Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who will become Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad steps down on Friday, said he is ready to shoulder the responsibilities that come with the job.

The Deputy Prime Minister said he was prepared to rise to the domestic and external challenges, as required of the Prime Minister.

"Yes, I am ready," he said today when asked about taking over the top job from Dr Mahathir, who is stepping down after 22 years at the helm.

Abdullah was speaking at a media conference after opening the annual general meeting of the Federation of Hokkien Associations of Malaysia (picture on page 3) here.

He said had visited many parts of the country over the past two months and all quarters expressed their willingness to work with him.

He also urged the people to maintain racial harmony so that the Government could continue developing the country.

He said all the country's successes were the result of unity and co-operation of the various races.

"That is why I stress the need for us to ensure the country remains safe and peaceful. We have to ensure peace prevails so that we can use all the opportunities for further progress.

"Nothing can be achieved if the country is unsafe even if we are intelligent, knowledgeable, industrious and efficient."

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said the people, irrespective of race, must reject racial, religious and ideological extremism.

"We must know how to give and take. If you cannot do that, you should live all by yourself," he said.

"We must jealously guard our way of maintaining peace based on our modesty and tolerance."

Abdullah said the people must also thank Dr Mahathir for his contributions to the nation and for turning them into a confident people.

He said Dr Mahathir was responsible for the country's immense success during his 22 years of leadership and it was now the duty of the people to keep improving on them.