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I need sincere friends, not apple polishers, says Abdullah

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today he needs friends who can assist him in carrying out his duties effectively and not mere "apple polishers" whose insincerity can bring about disaster.

The Prime Minister said that was why he wanted "correct information" and not glossy stories.

He said every officer must provide accurate information to ministers, ministry secretaries-general or department directors-general because wrong information would court disaster.

"I have to ensure that information given to me is accurate, correct. If it is wrong information, then my response would also certainly be wrong. This could cause losses and chaos.

"But if friends just say this person supports me, that person is with me, but all is false talk and mere praising, then this is not right. Things like this do not bring any good, especially in the context of what I need to accomplish," he said in the programme Bersama Perdana Menteri which was aired over TV1 at 10pm.

The 40-minute programme was hosted by RTM news officer Monshi Abdullah and Berita Harian group editor Hishamuddin Aun.

Abdullah also said he realised that people made comparisons over his ways and that of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad but he said he was not concerned, adding that although leadership styles differed, the objectives remained the same, which is for the future of the people and nation.

"That is our commitment, Dr Mahathir's commitment to all Malaysians. So we work together towards that direction."

Abdullah said that after 22 years, most of the rakyat only knew Dr Mahathir as the Prime Minister.

On the judiciary, Abdullah said in his meeting with senior judicial officers (judges) at a buka puasa (breaking of fast) event recently, they were determined to change their image from being branded "not independent".

He said the judiciary had been branded as pro-Government just because a decision was not favourable to a certain group.

He said the rakyat's response to his various proposals since 10 days ago was very good and meant that they supported the action taken in efforts to overcome weaknesses.

He expressed hope there would be co-operation and not merely lip service.

Abdullah also wants co-operation based on the principle of "work with me".

The Prime Minister also spoke about his time with his family, children, his passion for golf apart from issues concerning the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Earlier, Abdullah told all ministries to cut down on organising elaborate events, opening ceremonies or project launches and giving out expensive souvenirs.

"When we organise an official opening or launch for a particular project or an event, it is sometimes too lavish. Firstly, this takes up time and secondly, it requires added expenditure.

"Therefore, let preparations be moderate, the important thing being to see the successful implementation of a particular project," he said when fielding questions at a Press conference at Parliament

after tabling the Budget 2004 at Dewan Negara today.

Abdullah said there was also no need for expensive souvenirs or elaborate corsages that sometimes "poked the chin".

"The giving of products made by the rakyat, for example, kuih or handicraft, that we understand. But there is no need to buy expensive souvenirs," he said.

Abdullah said he had communicated this to all secretaries-general of ministries and heads of services at a special meeting at his office in Putrajaya this morning.

He said the Chief Secretary to the Government would look into the matter and inform the respective departments.

On whether the boosting of Bumiputera equity ownership through the proposed Dana Harapan (a new investment body) would be managed by Permodalan Nasional Berhad, Abdullah said it could, adding that a decision would be made later.

On the Government's decision to award Gamuda Bhd-Malaysia Mining Corp (MMC) Bhd consortium to build a RM14.5 billion electrified dual-rail track linking Johor Baru and Padang Besar (635.8km), Abdullah said the package would not be re-looked.

On another matter, Abdullah expressed regret over the bombing in Riyadh by suspected al-Qaeda suicide bombers.

"We hope the Saudi Government will be able to face the situation calmly and take appropriate measures to ensure that the safety of the country will be maintained."

On the just-concluded elections in Japan, Abdullah congratulated Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. "We hope our relationship with Japan will not change and will continue as usual."

On the Malaysian economy, Abdullah said targets had been set and it was a matter of achieving them, adding that the domestic economy must be strengthened.

"I believe very strongly that we must have the right attitude. People are very important, ready to work hard and increase productivity and provide the right kind of service.

"The economy is still sound. Inflation rates are very low and that is something we are happy about. Generally, the economy is healthy," Abdullah said.