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I'm ready to lead BN, says Abdullah

Ainon Mohd

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today he is ready to lead the Barisan Nasional in the next general election but added that he will decide on the date "when the time comes".

"I am readybut I cannot announce the date now. I will make a decision at the right time. I thank Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his trust in me to lead the BN in the next general election and I am ready to shoulder this responsibility," said Abdullah who is also Umno deputy president.

Abdullah, who had earlier chaired the Umno management meeting at the party headquarters here, was asked whether he was ready to lead the BN in the election.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir had, in an interview with Reuters, said the election date would be decided by his successor, Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir also shot down speculation that he would call for a general election before stepping down in October.

Speculation was widespread, not only among the Opposition but also Umno and other BN parties that Dr Mahathir may opt to stay on and lead one last election campaign to hand Abdullah a victory.

To this, Abdullah said : "That you have to ask the Prime Minister but I will hold on to what Dr Mahathir has said on the transition of power and that the transition will be smooth.

"Some people are forever speculating as if they do not understand the transition plan that has been prepared. They want to see us in chaos, then they will be happy.

"There is no reason for me to think that something is not right or to be disturbed by all the speculation as I hold on to what Dr Mahathir said and not to rumours or speculation."

On the meeting today, Abdullah said the management meeting did not discuss the general election.

The management committee also held a meeting with the Terengganu Umno liaison committee during which, Abdullah said, it was briefed on Terengganu Umno's activities.

He said the committee also discussed the date for the Umno annual general assembly and would submit the proposed date to the supreme council for deliberation.