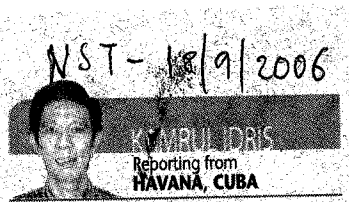


Reform agenda still on track, says Abdullah



IS the Prime Minister's reform agenda grinding to a halt?

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi does not think so and yesterday answered critics who worry that his zeal to change the way the government is run is on the wane.

"It's not that I've totally forgotten or don't care at all about reforms, but reforms must be introduced after careful planning and study and results cannot be expected overnight."

He said it was "all right we are a bit late, provided we have looked into all the relevant aspects to analyse an issue".

Abdullah was asked to comment on the statement by Datuk Zaid Ibrahim (BN-Kota Baru) in Parliament last week that the Prime Minister had still not introduced reforms as promised though it had been three years since he assumed the post.

He said reforms in the civil service needed a change in the mindset of civil servants towards reducing bureaucracy so as not to burden many parties. This required the help of government officers.

He cited several moves to change the way the public sector worked, including setting up the National Integrity Institute and strengthening the Anti-Corruption Agency.

In Parliament, the setting up of select committees was to allow backbenchers and the Opposition more room for debate.

"Actually, this is how Parliament should play its role, allowing parliamentarians to criticise the government, but in a constructive

manner aimed at propelling the country to greater heights in terms of development."

On Zaid's assertion that his initiatives had been undermined by a lack of political support, Abdullah said decisions were arrived at after consultations in the Cabinet.

On politics, Abdullah said that there were no problems, be they

involving politicians or the Cabinet.

Rather than indicating a loss of control, differences were natural given the freedom permitted to ministers to express their views, he said.

"There are still many people who don't understand; they say Pak Lah has lost control.

"That's my way of doing things. Everybody has his way of

doing things.

"The objectives are still the same, there is no change, but the way (of doing it) is my way."

Abdullah's answers yesterday are not likely to satisfy his critics, who believe that more "big fish" should be charged in court for corruption and that even more should be done to slash red tape in the public sector.