

PM: No reason to continue NEP once objectives are met

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KUALA LUMPUR: There is no reason for Malaysia to continue the New Economy Policy's (NEP) affirmative action when its targets, especially the 30 per cent Bumiputera equity, are achieved.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said it was not easy to restructure society by eradicating poverty and bridging the gap between Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

"I don't think it will be permanent, (but) it is important to address the imbalance, the ethnic imbalance, it is absolutely important.

"At the same time to create a situation where the (Bumiputera) people can now be actively involved in business and in-

dustry, that's not easily done," he said in an interview with cable news network Al-Jazeera. The interview was broadcast yesterday.

When asked how long it would take to achieve the target, Abdullah said the government was aiming for 2020 or earlier.

"Once we achieve it, there's no reason why we should have that policy anymore.

"We cannot go on with this forever. It is intended to be a policy to help, to assist them (the Bumiputeras) to obtain certain objectives.

"When the objectives are met, there is no reason for the continuation of the policy because the policy is anchored on the objectives and the

faster we get to the objectives, the faster we'll be able to throw away the crutch."

On whether the criticisms of his predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had affected foreign investment, Abdullah said: "Whether it will be a problem or not depends on how you manage the situation.

"I have decided not to respond to all the accusations that have been made against me because I'm concentrating on my job. I have a lot of work to do.

"I don't want to be engaged in this kind of verbal war.

"I have a job to do and I'm doing it and I'm proving to

Malaysians and Malaysians have noticed it.

"In Malaysia, what is happening today is the economy is performing better."

On the Palestinian peace process, the prime minister hoped the recently formed national unity government would work and called on Israel to recognise it.

"At least Hamas should be given a chance to see how they are going to manage.

"A group that has been engaged in activities which have been branded as terrorism normally changes when it's given the power to govern," he said.

On Iran's nuclear programme and the West's hostility to President Mahmoud Ah-

madinejad, Abdullah said Teheran was willing to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect its facilities.

"President Ahmadinejad is a man who has been pushed, pressed against the wall," he said.

"So it's going to be very difficult. It is the reaction of a person who feels that there is so much against him."

On the possibility of a United States attack on Iran, the prime minister said he did not think it likely that President George W. Bush would go for Iran the same way he did with Iraq.

"I think it would be better if no military action is taken against Iran."