

PM: I'll run in next elections

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There is a lot of work to be done, says Pak Lah in BBC interview

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wants to run in the next general election and continue leading the country.

"I think so. I think so. There is a lot of work to be done. There is a lot of work. Yes," the Prime Minister said when asked if he still had the appetite for the job and planned to contest in the next elections, expected in 2009.

He was speaking in an interview over BBC's *Asia Today*, which was aired yesterday morning.

On Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's criticism of him, Abdullah said the former prime minister had the right to say whatever he wanted, but as the current leader, he (Abdullah) had a government to run.

"I have to do whatever is best. The economy is better now. The 9th Malaysia Plan was launched last year, and today it's gathering momentum.

"Maybe (the criticism is because) we are a little slow and he (Dr Mahathir) is getting impatient," he added.

Abdullah also denied that there

was a more aggressive advancement of Islam at the official level and that this was making non-Muslims in the country more uncomfortable.

"No, no - that's what some believe. But as far as we are concerned, we believe in freedom of worship. This is guaranteed by the (Federal) Constitution. People of other faiths are free to practise their religion in Malaysia, and at the same time we do not marginalise them.

"They participate in the Government because we have a government that shares power among Muslim and non-Muslim - the Hindus, Buddhists and Christians," he said.

He agreed that some Muslim groups were trying to propagate a more aggressive Islam in Malaysia.

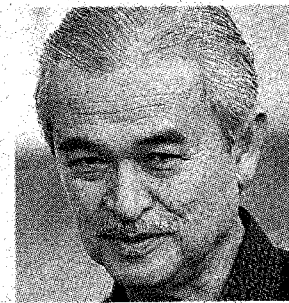
He noted that a political party (PAS) had been talking about setting up an Islamic state, adding that the country had an open electoral system.

"They (PAS) contest the elections. If the non-Muslims want to vote for them it's up to them," he added.

Abdullah admitted that there

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DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI



were some in Malaysia who were inclined towards militant philosophies such as the Jemaah Islamiah (JI); but added that the authorities had been very quick to act and curb such tendencies.

"We acted very fast. We have to engage them. We have to talk to them, counsel them. That has been done and that's what we have been doing all the time," he said.

"Islam is the official religion and the practice here has been moderate and we have done very well."

Abdullah also took to task US

President George W. Bush's lopsided policies in West Asia, which he said angered the Muslims.

He pointed out that shortly after the Sept 11, 2001, terror attack in the US, when Bush declared the war on terror "everyone supported it because we thought it (the attack) was something unfair - something that should not have happened."

"After that he (Bush) changed the game plan. He attacked Iraq and went into Afghanistan," Abdullah said, adding that it was

very obvious that in the Middle East issues, the US president always favoured Israel.

"This action that he has taken has caused a lot of unhappiness and angered the Muslims," he said, adding that the US president should instead try to create a better understanding of Islam in the Christian West.

Abdullah denied that moderate Muslims leaders like him were reticent about speaking about sectarian violence among warring Muslim groups, pointing out that he had spoken up against it a number of times.

He said he has been condemning militants "very often" because the religion has zero tolerance for terrorism.

Acknowledging that a chasm has developed between the West and Islam, with both sides demonising each other, Abdullah said it was important to create a better understanding of Islam.

This, he believe, could be done by continuing to talk about what Islam really is.