

Pak Lah: FTA talks still on

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We're still fine-tuning issues, he says

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about whether the Free Trade Agreement with the United States is signed by the end of the month, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Prime Minister said talks were definitely "not off" and Malaysia was still doing its "homework" and fine-tuning the issues which have been raised.

"We want to make sure that the end results from the negotiations is something that benefits us and our interests," he told reporters after launching the Pantai Sentral Park Project

in Pantai Dalam yesterday.

When asked whether the 58 outstanding issues would be sorted out within the next three weeks, Abdullah said:

"Whatever we do, the most important thing is that we want to ensure that what we achieve is best for Malaysia. For us, that's our priority."

The United States had set a March deadline to conclude the talks because it needed to present it to the US Congress 90 days before its Trade Promotion Authority to negotiate FTAs expired in June.

On whether was more pessimistic now

about the FTA, Abdullah said:

"I am not saying anything about pessimism and optimism. But the fact is that we are able to go through a lot of those issues."

Asked if it was not a big deal for Malaysia if the talks failed, Abdullah said: "We will talk about it if that happens."

In Osaka, Japan, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia would only sign the FTA with the United States if there was no negative impact on the country.

He said Malaysia needed the FTA but the agreement should be on terms that were

mutually acceptable.

"Negotiations have gone a long way and we are in the final stages of putting together our position.

"This month, we will make a position and will try to narrow the differences with the US," he said during a luncheon with Japanese businessmen yesterday.

Recently, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who is coordinating the negotiations, said Malaysia and the United States had already agreed on the non-negotiable issues such as the bumiputra policy and the sovereign right of the nation to make policies.

However, there were another 58 outstanding issues that needed to be worked out.