

Chavez: Abdullah can pass off as a Venezuelan

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THERE is no doubt that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and President Hugo Chavez share a special bond.

Chavez may not have been at the Simon Bolivar airport to welcome Abdullah on Sunday and at the wreath-laying ceremony at the National Pantheon but he did all he could to make the visiting Prime Minister feel at home.

After a meeting with Abdullah at his office at Miraflores Palace yesterday, Chavez invited himself to a business luncheon organised by the Malaysian government for Malaysian and Venezuelan businessmen.

Addressing Abdullah as "my dear brother", the Venezuelan leader said the visit "has a

deep meaning for us".

Abdullah is the first head of government to arrive in Caracas since Chavez won the presidential election early this month, a visit which also coincided with the 20th anniversary of Malaysia-Venezuela diplomatic relations.

"Venezuela is building itself again, and we are keen to follow your development model," he said.

To Chavez's quip that he had come uninvited, Abdullah replied that, "He has apologised he is an intruder but a friend is never an intruder".

The dinner hosted by Chavez for Abdullah at the Military Club may have been an official function but the two leaders were relaxed in each

other's company, exchanging views and jokes.

Chavez said that Abdullah could pass off as a Venezuelan.

"I am certain that if Prime Minister Badawi is seen on the street, he will be counted as a local. We have the same traits and share the same dream and the same struggle," he said.

Abdullah then abandoned the text of his speech and spoke off the cuff.

The Prime Minister said that he had told Chavez that if he won the presidential election, it meant many people wanted him to do something good.

"Now I understand why he is in a hurry to do good things for his people."