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PM happy with survey results

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PENANG: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said a recent survey, which shows that many Malaysians have faith in the democratic process and electoral system, reflects the country's credibility in holding free and fair elections.

The premier said yesterday he was happy to read the report, which reflected the people's aspirations and wishes.

He was commenting on the global survey "Voice of the People", conducted by TNS and Gallup International.

The report, released on Wednesday, said 88% of Malaysians polled were satisfied with democracy and 74% said elections were free and fair - which was among the strongest vote of confidence for a country in the survey of 10 countries in Asia.

"This is good. There may be some who are not happy but I am sure many are happy with the system we have believed in and practised all this time," Abdullah told reporters after opening

the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle Small and Medium Enterprises Conference and Expo 2007.

"We have scored high points compared to other countries in the region but we can do more and we must move to do better.

"We have always believed and ensured the electoral process is democratic and fair. Those who are eligible to vote are always given a chance," he said.

Abdullah said the survey reflected the government's efforts to be a government for the people. He said projects like the Northern Corridor Economic Region were mooted to ensure there was no top-sided development in the country.

"The success of the nation has to be whole and we are a people-centred government and we always want to remain a government which reflects the aspirations of the people. Those living in this country and calling it their home want development, peace and prosperity and enjoy higher standards of living.

"They want a government where the people will be safe and they believe their

children can grow up well here in this country because of the opportunities we offer them, like education," he said.

Commenting on foreign press reports that Malaysia is not treating the citizens fairly, Abdullah said these people knew little about the country.

"When I was serving as foreign minister, many of those I met would ask me about our policies of power sharing as they found it difficult to understand our ways, which are uncommon anywhere else in the world. In other countries, coalition governments are only formed when there is no majority after a general election, but we do not have that problem.

"We already have a national front, with one manifesto, and seats being allocated even before we go to the polls, which has been carried out for years. It does not happen anywhere else and they cannot understand [such] power sharing and that all our decisions are made based on consensus," he said.

"If [MIC president Datuk Seri S.] Samy Vellu does not agree on something, we

discuss it further," he said.

Abdullah said the Hindu Rights Action Force's (Hindraf) accusations that the government practised genocide and apartheid was done with malice.

"Do you think the cabinet, where half of them are non-Muslims, would support apartheid or ethnic cleansing, and put up with the atrocities which Hindraf says we have been committing in the past 50 years? Do you think half the cabinet would allow this and associate themselves with the government?" he asked.

Abdullah said he was worried the Indians may get carried away with Hindraf's claims and the SMSes going around.

He said businesses will be affected and no one will win or gain if there were to be trouble.

"If the Indians and Malays fight, the Chinese too will be affected. The government is always cautious of the fact that we need to be together," he said.

Asked if the election was looming, he said in jest: "Of course it is looming, as the five-year mandate is getting shorter."