

Abdullah: Only credible ones will be accepted

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KUALA LUMPUR: The prime minister yesterday told aspiring Umno leaders that they could no longer expect to be chosen as candidates merely based on their strength in the party.

Unlike previously when voters chose the party the candidate represented, surveys showed that trends were changing and the credibility and integrity of the candidate played a major part in them being voted in.

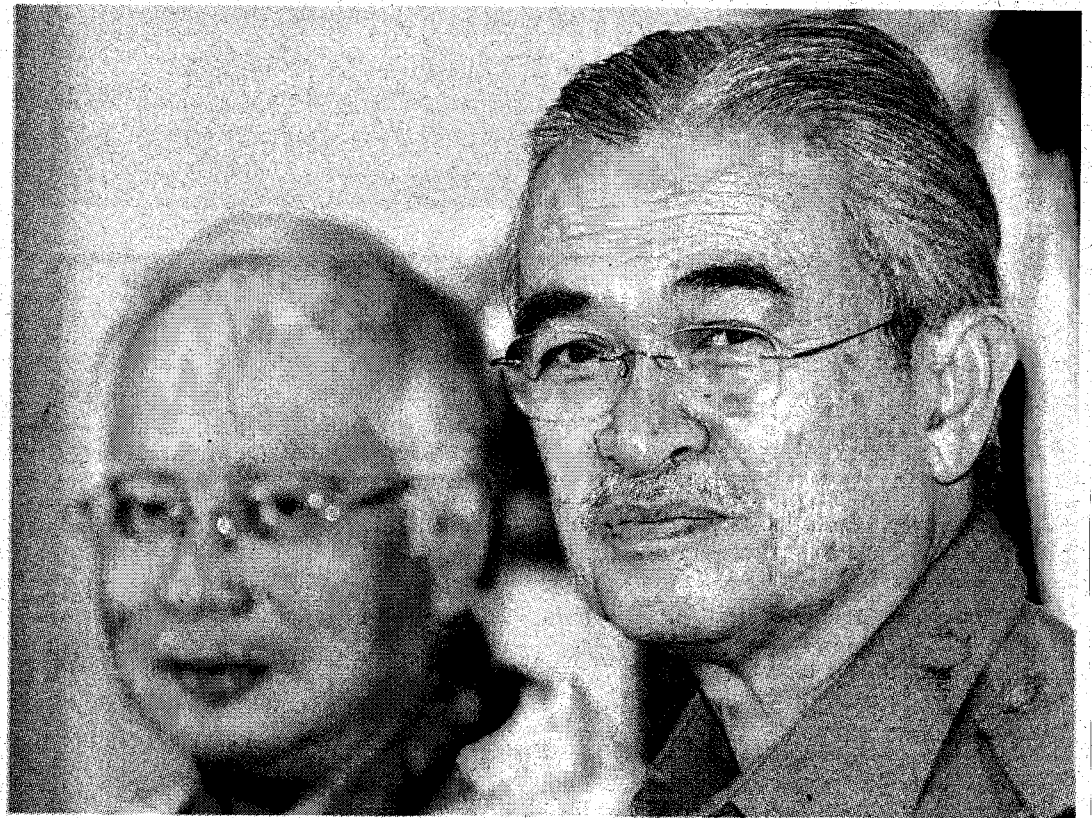
Delegates interviewed after a two-hour closed-door meeting with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he told them that research by three organisations showed voters were more discerning about the quality of candidates fielded by a political party.

"The prime minister revealed that 60 per cent of those interviewed said they would vote based on the credibility of the individual and only 40 per cent said they would vote for the party," Umno supreme council member and deputy information minister Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said.

"Candidates must not only be clean but must be seen to be clean. The candidates must have integrity and must be known to provide excellent service to their constituents at grassroots level," Zahid said.

Some delegates believed that Abdullah was preparing the ground for the eventuality that "warlords", who had questionable ethics and incumbents who had not served their constituents well would be dropped.

Delegates said Abdullah cautioned them that the days when Umno could just place someone wearing a songkok and expect to



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says voters are more discerning and they know how to evaluate candidates. At left is Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

be voted in because he was from Umno were over.

"He told us that Malaysian society was well-informed and educated and the information age had opened up new frontiers. Umno now has to fight hard to get each vote," one delegate said.

Abdullah told incumbents among the Umno leaders present that if they were dropped, they should not sulk but should instead help the new candidates.

In past elections, some candidates, who were "warlords" or influential in their areas, would not lift a finger to help the party if they

were dropped as candidates. In some extreme cases, they would even sabotage the new candidate.

Abdullah, delegates said, told them that BN candidates in the coming general election would be those who were willing to work for the people, regardless of their race, and were not self-serving and corrupt.

Umno, he told them, was not short of good and credible people to offer as candidates.

Umno Youth head and Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein confirmed that Abdullah warned that "the candi-

date factor will be one of the most important. Voters are well informed and they know how to evaluate candidates".

Umno Youth exco member Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir said Abdullah had presented the delegates with a "report card" on what the government had done since winning the 2004 elections.

Mukhriz said: "He told us not to sit on our laurels and get complacent.

"The struggle continues and we have a big responsibility due to the expectations the people place on us."