

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE: 24 / 02 / 2008

Voters have a clear choice, says Abdullah

NST - 24 / 2 / 2008

SEBERANG JAYA: The prime minister reminded Malaysians on the eve of nominations yesterday that they go to the polls in two weeks with a clear option: choose a government with half a century of experience or an alliance of convenience put up by the opposition.

"The people have to think of the choices they have before them. On one side, we have the Barisan Nasional which has a track record that goes back 50 years.

"On the other side, it is simply a pact of political expediency (between the DAP, Pas and PKR) for the sake of contesting the election," said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in an interview.

He said the BN had gone through much, including the challenges of overcoming problems both domestically and from outside the country.

"Yet, it is a coalition that has remained intact all these years and is always on track in ensuring continuity of the country's development and progress."

The pact formed by the opposition, he said, was a loose co-operation among parties which move in opposite directions.

"Their obsession is they want to deny BN the full support of the people. They have nothing for the people and they form the pact just because they have an election to face, whereas in actual fact they are three different groups of people with three differing ideologies.

"Objectively speaking, they are not credible. It is just a pact of convenience with no shared beliefs and no shared ideology.

"In the final analysis, no alliance or co-operation of convenience can work. It just comes down to that."

Asked what the BN's message to voters would be in the election, Abdullah said:

"In the last four years, we have had a lot of success on the economy, social issues, education and many other areas. Yes, we made a lot of promises in our manifesto in 2004 and we have delivered on many of them.

"Some are still works-in-progress; some we could not implement immediately because they required legal ratification.

"We will put up our progress report for the people to judge. All this will be in our manifesto which I will launch after the nominations," he said, adding that the people could then judge for themselves.

Abdullah was asked about the protests by some Umno members and leaders in several parts of the country against the decision to drop some incumbents.

The prime minister said this was a normal occurrence in every election and recounted cases in which he himself had had to drop candidates in Penang where he is state Umno liaison chief.

Abdullah, who is the BN chairman, said there were protests in Terengganu and Perlis and on a smaller scale in one or two other states.

"But in most parts of the country, there are not many problems," he said.

On his experience in Umno and how people react when asked to make way for others, Abdullah said: "I think it happens in every state. People who are expected to give way find it difficult to give up.

"Their supporters don't want them to give up. Some cry, some get angry.

"But I always tell them that when they were first chosen as candidates, there were others who were also disappointed, threatened not to support them, took down flags and closed down operations rooms.

"But in the end, the love for the party prevailed and they came back and supported the party in the polls," Abdullah said.

Abdullah said there were incumbents who reacted very calmly when told they were being replaced; and there were a few who would react angrily.

"But I think generally, they are all good people. They will overcome their anger and will work together for the BN's victory."