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# 'No guarantee of cabinet posts'

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**SEBERANG JAYA:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday said none of his cabinet members who were contesting parliamentary seats — except his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Razak — were guaranteed a cabinet position, even if they won in the general election.

"I have made no promises to anyone. I have a free hand (after the election)," Abdullah said during an exclusive interview with the New Straits Times Group of newspapers at his hotel suite in Butterworth on the eve of nominations for the March 8 polls.

He was asked why he had retained many ageing members of his cabinet as candidates when public expectations were high that there would be renewal and rejuvenation by bringing in new faces.

However, while there has been a very high percentage of changes at lower levels such as members of parliament, parliamentary secretaries, some deputy ministers, state assemblymen and executive councillors, and also in the component parties, none of the Umno menteri besar and ministers were dropped.

A significant number of the Umno ministers are aged 60 and above and are still contesting.

Abdullah said he had a different



criteria to consider in choosing candidates for the general election.

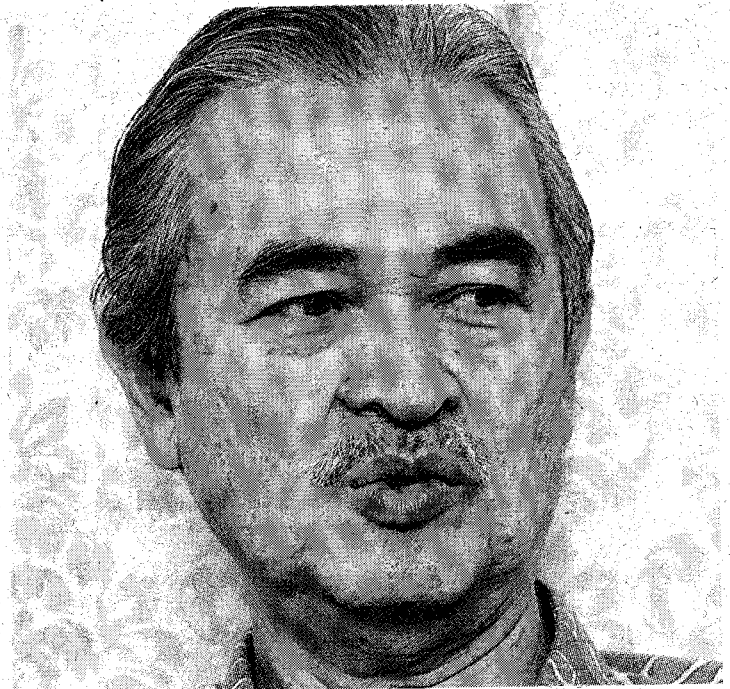
"In facing elections, the party must be led by those who have experience because we do not want problems which may affect our chances to crop up due to inexperience," he said.

At the same time, Abdullah said it did not mean the older leaders who had been retained would automatically become members of the cabinet again.

"Some of them may not be members of the cabinet; but they are still active and experienced enough to serve their constituents as ordinary MPs," he said.

"I did not promise anybody anything; whether a return to the cabinet or any other post," he emphasised.

Asked what criteria he would use in choosing his cabinet should the Barisan Nasional form the next government again, Abdullah said: "I will choose qualified peo-



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says he will choose qualified people to form the next government.

ple. Age is not the only factor."

The prime minister was jovial and candid during the interview despite a hectic schedule in his home state of Penang.

Commenting on the signs of fatigue in the journalists around him, he said he had had only four or five hours' sleep in the last five days, and had worked over meals.

"I don't feel tired," he said.

In scrutinising the candidate lists, Abdullah said he and his deputy had ensured there were many more young qualified people who were chosen as candidates at parliament and state levels.

"More and more young people are coming in. They are our future," he stressed, saying the younger generation would be given more opportunities.