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Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, says Abdullah

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday denied having a "gentleman's agreement" with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad five years ago to serve as prime minister for only one term before handing over the post to his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

"There is no gentleman's agreement," Abdullah said after opening the Pavilion shopping mall.

"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion."

The prime minister was asked to comment on an agreement said to have been made between him and his predecessor Dr Mahathir as claimed by the former prime minister.

Najib, responding to questions on the matter at a function in Putrajaya, reiterated his support and loyalty to the prime minister.

At the same time, he said his focus was on the upcoming general election and to ensure the victory of Barisan Nasional.

Najib said he did not know anything about the agreement. "No, I don't know. I real-

ly don't know about that. However, I am committed to supporting (the prime minister) and remaining loyal to him.

"I don't know. You (reporters) have to ask the parties concerned."

Dr Mahathir had said on Wednesday that since Abdullah was older than Najib, he should be prime minister for one term and then Najib should be able to take over.

Dr Mahathir claimed the agreement was made in 2003 when he handed over the leadership to Abdullah but admitted that he had no way of proving it.

The former prime minister

had also said he was willing to help BN campaign in the next general election provided the candidates fielded are "clean, honest and straight".

To this, Abdullah said: "*Baguslah* (that's good). We want to field candidates with a clean track record."

Asked whether he would agree to meet non-governmental organisations and opposition parties to discuss current issues in the country, the prime minister said he would meet the NGOs.

"I have spoken to the NGOs," Abdullah said, adding that he did not meet opposition parties because there was too

much politics involved.

On intentions expressed by some BN leaders, including menteri besar, MPs and state assemblyman, to defend their seats and others not seeking re-election in the coming polls, Abdullah said he was not stopping them from making their intentions known but ultimately he was the one who would decide on the candidates.

"I will not prevent them from having their opinions. But I will make the final decision," he said, adding that only capable candidates who were willing to serve the party would be selected.