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PM vows to fight crime, expand economy, heal nation

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has pledged to expand the economy, fight crime and heal the nation with an attentive ear after the Barisan Nasional's losses in the 12th general election.

"Although the size of our majority would be considered a landslide in most countries, the fact that it has been significantly reduced and we have had setbacks in five of our 13 states indicates that we need to do more for those who feel disaffected," the prime minister said in a commentary published on Monday in the *Wall*

Street Journal Asia.

"I know there is discontent among some parts of our community. I accept that it is our responsibility, as the newly re-elected government of all Malaysians, to find practical solutions to ease that discontent, to listen to grievances and to seek to remedy them."

Referring to critics of the electoral system, he said Saturday's election was "proof positive that our country does indeed enjoy a free, fair and highly competitive democracy".

Abdullah laid out three "critically important points" in

his post-election agenda.

"I will dedicate myself in this second term, to healing the divisions which became evident during the campaign.

"That will mean developing new and concrete initiatives, not just rhetoric, that bring our people together and ensure that no one is left behind as Malaysia prospers, whether they are ethnic Malays, Chinese or Indians," he said.

Abdullah said the goal could be achieved with the economy having registered 7.3 per cent growth in the last quarter, nearly full employment, more

than US\$100 billion (RM320 billion) in foreign exchange reserves and a record US\$13.7 billion in foreign investments.

The government would continue working to wipe out crime and corruption, he said.

"The people's desire for law and order is as important in Malaysia as it is everywhere. The same is true of the need to make additional progress in battling corruption, which is both immoral and distorts competition in free markets."

He wants Malaysia to remain a business-friendly, free market economy that wel-

comed investment.

In the soul-searching certain to follow the election outcome, the country "cannot afford a period of sitting back and risk stalling our progress and our economic growth", he said.

"The election results will not diminish for a moment our determination to expand the Malaysian economy, to continue our successful programme of poverty eradication and to provide a level playing field for all.

"I believe that Malaysia will continue its strong economic growth in 2008," the prime minister said.