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Najib will take over 'when time comes'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Najib Razak is the natural successor to the Umno presidency, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

Speaking at a closed-door briefing for Umno grassroots leaders here yesterday, the prime minister and Umno president said there had never been any problems between them.

"I assure you there are no problems between us, and he is the one who will be succeeding me."

While not saying when this is likely to happen, Abdullah made it clear he would hand over to Najib when the time is right.

He reiterated that he would not be stepping down.

"I will know when to go, but give

me a chance to implement what I have promised," he said.

At a press conference later, Abdullah said unlike former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim then, Najib saw himself as a successor and not an alternative choice for prime minister.

"Najib is not like Anwar, who went around saying that he was the people's alternative leader when he was up against (former prime minister) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he said.

The 90-minute meeting with the grassroots leaders was the first such gathering since the March 8 general election.

Also attended by Najib and senior party leaders, Abdullah touched on the importance of

strengthening the party, on reforms and liberalisation, the party's future direction and the post-election political scenario.

He said the overwhelming support given to the Barisan Nasional in 2004 was based on promises made to overcome the weaknesses and shortcomings of the previous administration.

He said, however, that not all of the expectations could be met, although the fundamentals, especially with regard to the economy, were already taking shape.

"But our fundamentals are strong now and we hope this strong position could be further strengthened in the future."

Abdullah was confident the rakyat was behind his leadership,

saying the government only wants the best for all Malaysians.

"In continuing this leadership, I want to strengthen the party and the administration as was promised to the people.

"I will not run away. I have a responsibility and a duty to the rakyat. Work together and we will achieve success."

Abdullah said during the meeting, he also referred to the widespread perception that he was a weak leader, and that he left many important decisions to his son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin.

"It is as though Khairy is the only one who is smart and who decides on everything and that the supreme council and the cabinet are stupid."