

Pak Lah wants earlier mandate from people

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Polls will let Govt go ahead with projects, PM tells CNN

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PETALING JAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has, for the first time, revealed there will be an early general election to enable the Government to go ahead with its development plans.

"It will be good to have a good mandate from the people so that the Government can go ahead with its development programmes," said the Prime Minister when responding to a question in an interview on CNN's *World News Asia* yesterday on why he would call for an early election.

Abdullah said the possible involvement of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in the next elections was not a factor on his mind.

"There are other matters that I have to think about before I recommend the dissolution of Parliament and fixing the date for the elections," he said.

Abdullah is attending the World Economic Forum in Switzerland.

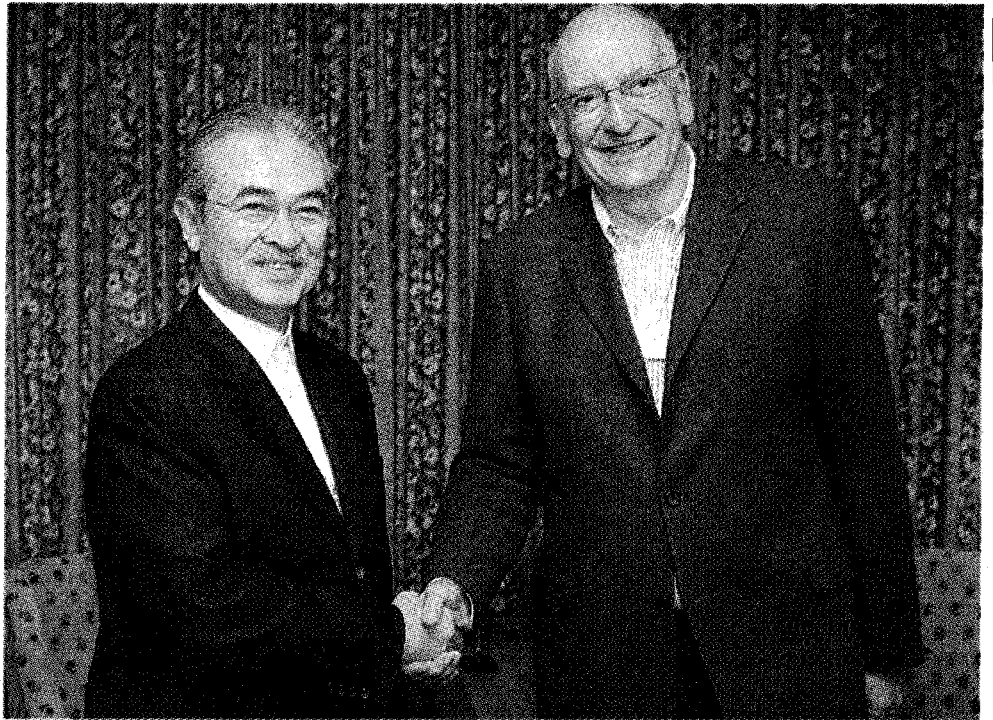
He also said that the Government was talking to a lot of people to address the problems affecting Malaysian Indians as well as groups and NGOs representing them.

Abdullah said the Government had successfully reduced the poverty level from 60% after independence to 5.7% currently, with a small 1.2% who are still living in hardcore poverty.

In **DAVOS**, the prime minister said the Asean Charter had laid the foundation for the grouping to successfully meet the challenges of a globalising world.

He said the grouping's full potential had yet to be realised, adding that the only constant factor would be the centrality of Asean as a group.

This would be especially in managing regional affairs and seizing the opportunities, he said during the plenary session on *The Emerging Asian Community: The Role of Asean* at the World Economic Congress' annual meeting



Bilateral meet: Abdullah shaking hands with Swiss Confederation president and federal councillor of Home Affairs Pascal Couchepin on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos yesterday. — Reuters

yesterday.

The other speakers were Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien-Loong, Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and HSBC Holdings group chairman Stephen Green.

Abdullah said Asean's central role was not only to ensure South-East Asia's continuing stability and prosperity but also to ensure the peace and security of the wider East Asia.

On another matter, Abdullah said Malaysia would include inter-faith dialogues as part of the agenda at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on East Asia in Kuala Lumpur on June 15 and 16.

He said the issue was important to help pro-

mote greater understanding among people from multi-ethnic faiths.

He said WEF executive chairman Prof Klaus Schwab had suggested the topic be included as it could help reduce conflicts between the West and the Muslim world during their meeting on Thursday.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists after his plenary session on *Faith and Modernisation*, which drew a packed audience, Abdullah said he spoke about the negative view of Islam as a religion that supported terrorism.

He said Islam was not the problem but political, economic and strategic interests involving Muslims were.