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Umno-Abdullah

ABDULLAH'S WIN ANOTHER FEATHER IN FOREIGN MINISTRY'S CAP

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 10 (Bernama) -- The victory of Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as an Umno vice-president today is another feather in the cap of his ministry which has taken on a particularly high profile this year.

Abdullah's success in wresting one of the three powerful V-P slots came close on the heels of two other major developments involving the ministry, all in the last one month.

It began with the surprise promotion of Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Abdul Halim Ali last month as Chief Secretary to the Government, the highest post in the civil service.

Halim's appointment on Sept 16 was unexpected for more reasons than one. He had been the ministry's Secretary-General for hardly two weeks when he was named to succeed Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid who retired.

Secondly, he was never regarded as a top contender for the post.

Another coup for the ministry came just a day after Halim's promotion when Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tan Sri Razali Ismail was elected President of the current United Nations General Assembly for a one-year term.

It was the highest achievement for a Malaysian at the UN and Razali's election has been widely acclaimed even by Western nations which regard him as one of the world body's most capable ambassadors.

Born to a poor padi farmer family in Kedah, Razali did Malaysia particularly proud because he began his maiden speech as the UN General Assembly President in Bahasa Malaysia and was attired in Baju Melayu.

For Abdullah, today's victory was sweet, having failed to defend the post in the 1993 polls. Prior to that, he had been a three-term V-P.

His success was attributed to Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's emotional plea to the Umno General Assembly delegates just before polling began this morning to reject outright candidates who used money to jockey for party positions.

With Dr Mahathir coming down hard against the scourge of money politics, Abdullah, better known as Pak Lah, emerged as one of the favourites because in Umno circles his reputation as "Mr Clean" has never been questioned.

In fact, throughout the waiting period before the polls results were announced by permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah at 6.50pm today, Abdullah's name kept cropping up as one of the three winners in the seven-cornered fight.

Although the Foreign Affairs portfolio is a high profile post in most other countries, it is not so in Malaysia where it is eclipsed by other ministries such as Finance, Education, Home Affairs and Defence.

It was as Education Minister that he first became the Umno V-P in 1984. He later was appointed Defence Minister.

He was dropped from the Cabinet following the 1987 Umno polls but even without a Cabinet post, he managed to retain the V-P post in the 1990 elections.

The victorious Abdullah was hugged and congratulated by his supporters, many of whom shed tears of joy, as soon as he stepped down from the dais.

A way had to be cleared for Abdullah to leave the hall as the crowd eager to reach him caused a human congestion in the Dewan Merdeka.

Abdullah was again besieged by a sea of supporters outside the hall.

"My victory shows that the delegates and Umno members want me back," he said when asked about his feelings.

Expressing his gratitude, Abdullah pledged to give his best for the party.

-- BERNAMA
ARA AAM