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Upholding a 40-year old legacy of service

reports on "My Wakil Rakyat and I" by A. Kathirasen
MENTION of Kepala Batas invariably brings to mind its most famous son, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The Foreign Minister is into his fifth term as the MP for Kepala Batas and his popularity is still as strong, if not greater.

To many people, the much respected Abdullah Badawi is synonymous with Kepala Batas and the Minister himself is extremely fond of the place, taking great care to ensure that whatever happens in his constituency benefits his constituents first.

The workaholic is also very popular with a large segment of the Malaysian population. This was made clear when after the October 1996 Umno election, there was much cheer when he was declared a winner in the race for vice-president.

The history of Kepala Batas over the past 40 years is intertwined with the history of the family of Abdullah Badawi. Abdullah Badawi's grandfather Datuk Abdullah Fahmi was a respected Ulamak in the area and a State mufti.

He was very particular about religious education and did much to ensure the Malays in the area had some knowledge of Islam. He even established the Sekolah Agama Daerahul Maarifil Wataniah which today is a secondary religious school.

His son Datuk Ahmad Badawi was steeped in religion and nationalistic fervour. He was a founder member of Umno and served as deputy national Umno Youth leader for 18 years.

Today, several roads and institutions in Kepala Batas are named after members of this illustrious family. Among them are: Jalan Datuk Abdullah Fahmi, Jalan Datuk Ahmad Badawi, Sekolah Menengah Datuk Ahmad Badawi, Taman Datuk Abdullah Fahmi and Sekolah Menengah Abdul Kadir (an uncle of Abdullah Badawi).

Abdullah Badawi studied in the religious school established by his grandfather, Sekolah Kebangsaan Permatang Bertam and the Bukit Mertajam High School before graduating with an Honours degree in Islamic Studies from Universiti Malaya in 1964.

He joined the civil service and during the May 13 riots, was appointed principal secretary to the National Operations Council convened by Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak to restore normalcy to the nation.

When the NOC was dissolved, he became the director of youth in the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In 1978, he quit as deputy secretary-general of the Ministry of Youth and Sports to contest the Kepala Batas parliamentary seat.

The Gabungan Pelajar Melayu Semananjung president from 1962 to 1964 and student activist was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Territory Ministry in 1978. In 1980 he became Deputy Minister in the same Ministry.

In August 1981, he was elevated to the post of Minister without portfolio in the Prime Minister's Department. Four years later he became Education Minister and in mid-1986 he was moved to the Defence Ministry.

From the middle of 1987 to March 15, 1991, he was out of the Cabinet following some internal Umno politics and his alleged involvement with Team B led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah who took on Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the party presidency.

He has been Foreign Minister since 1991 and his term has seen Malaysia

gaining greater respect and recognition in the international arena although he attributes this to the dynamic leadership of Dr Mahathir.

Abdullah Badawi does not have a service centre. He says all the Assemblymen and the Umno, MCA and MIC machinery in Kepala Batas work in unison to tackle the problems of the people and therefore he has seen no need for a centre of his own.

"I am happy with the Assemblymen who are working very hard. The leaders of Umno branches and the BN component parties here are also hardworking and very co-operative. So are the government servants here."

However, he tries to be in his constituency as often as his official duties permit.

Believing strongly in education, Abdullah Badawi has asked for more schools to be built in his constituency. There are now seven secondary schools here.

"During my time, there was no secondary school in Kepala Batas. I had to travel 20km to Bukit Mertajam on a rickety bus with wooden seats to study at the BM High. It took about an hour to reach school.

"I did not want that for my constituents and I am happy that there are now many secondary schools of quality here. I am also happy to see many people becoming better educated."

Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (BN-Umno)

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Age: 57

Married to Datin Endon Datuk Mahmood Ambak; two children

Fifth-term MP Foreign Minister

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