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Abdullah sheds some views about Dr Mahathir

IN this second and final part of the transcript from the live TV1 interview with New Straits Times Press group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi dwells on the imminent Sabah election and its heated campaign, debunks some myths about Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's style of rule, ponders on the advice of Tan Sri Musa Hitam on the true role of a Deputy Prime Minister and envisions the future of Umno and his own.

Q: There are opposition leaders in Sabah, including those who had led Sabah under the Barisan Nasional Government previously, who claim that the frequent visits of leaders from the peninsula is an effort to conquer the State.

Although this is only a political ploy on the part of the Opposition, do you see it as a form of instigation?

A: Yes. It is a serious matter and there are elements of instigation involved. The leaders are sowing hatred in the minds of Sabahans against national leaders and the Government ... this is a devious act to sow hatred. They want to scare Sabahans so they will not accept national leaders. These leaders fear that the presence of BN leaders from the peninsula would help strengthen the Sabah BN. They feel it would be easier for them to contest against Sabah BN without interference from BN leaders from the peninsula.

I have told the BN leaders in Sabah not to be influenced by the claims of the Opposition in Sabah. We are component parties. It is our responsibility to ensure that the BN wins anywhere it contested.

Q: Is there a possibility that the Opposition is making such claims because leaders from the peninsula have actually said unpleasant things while in Sabah like attempting to teach the Sabahans on the do's and don'ts?

A: I have never received any reports to that effect. The claims by the Opposition are baseless ... they are just playing with emotions.

Q: Many people say that Dr Mahathir is very stubborn, refuses to listen to advice and is power crazy. But the comments we hear when he chairs the Cabinet, (Umno) supreme council, and Barisan Nasional supreme council meetings are different. Do you have any examples to refute these claims? Are these claims inaccurate?

A: The claims are not only inaccurate but totally baseless. He always listens. During party and Cabinet meetings, we debate issues. There are some who say that if the meetings are videotaped and shown to the public, it would become one of the more interesting shows.

I remember an incident when we were facing the constitutional crisis years back. The Attorney-General had proposed some amendments to the Cabinet which would have given any Prime Minister absolute power in certain matters to deal with such complicated matters. But after looking at the draft of the proposal, Dr Mahathir rejected it, saying that it would give the Prime Minister absolute power and that it was unhealthy.

Dr Mahathir then said: "This is not the power I am asking for. I do not need such power. I am not going to be here long ... I do not know how the future Prime Ministers will react when they are given such absolute power."

All the Cabinet Ministers heaved a sigh of relief. If he was power crazy, I am sure he would have approved the amendments as the situation

then was very tense.

Q: But despite this, why are there still many who describe him as a person who is very stubborn and never compromises on anything?

A: Only God knows why some people think like that. Maybe it's because Dr Mahathir is a very direct person and calls a spade a spade. He does not beat around the bush. And when other Foreign Ministers meet Dr Mahathir in his office here, they are very surprised. They would say although Dr Mahathir is a very outspoken man, he is very different when they meet him in person. They say Dr Mahathir is willing to exchange ideas ... like there is no barrier. Before the meeting, the foreign dignitaries feel very tense as they would not know what to expect in their discussions with the Prime Minister, who is known to be a very outspoken individual.

Q: Although you served as Foreign Minister for quite some time, Dr Mahathir was the one who often commented on international issues. Did it make your job easier or more difficult?

A: It was much more easier. The only difficult part was to make sure that my statements did not contradict that made by the Prime Minister. Just like any head of government, Dr Mahathir has the main role to play when commenting on foreign issues such as those concerning government-to-government relations. The heads of governments are actually the first Foreign Ministers. We can all see that during the heads of government meetings. The Prime Ministers are the ones who make decisions.

Q: On Umno, there are some who claim that the party has lost its idealism and is outdated, that something needs to be done to bring back its glory years and regain its acceptance among the younger generation.

A: There is some truth to that. At present, the younger generation is not very interested to join Umno. We need to re-educate them. We must remind them of our struggles and objectives. Now people are unhappy because there are reports of alleged money politics and factionalism in the party. And why some party members are involved in business. So people are unhappy. But what is important is that we must be reminded of our struggle.

Q: In the coming general election, would more efforts be made to separate Umno from business, or in other words, a wakil rakyat should be a wakil rakyat and not both a wakil rakyat and a businessman?

A: It is not necessary. But whoever is chosen to be a wakil rakyat should carry out his duties accordingly. There is no regulation barring a wakil rakyat from venturing into business but he should not forget to serve his constituents and the party.

Q: In a recent edition of Mingguan Malaysia, former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam had reminded you that as Deputy Prime Minister, you should always remember that this is Dr Mahathir's administration. Musa had also openly acknowledged where he went wrong when he was Deputy Prime Minister and according to him, where Datuk Seri Anwar (Ibrahim), had gone wrong. Do you agree with his comments?

A: There is truth in what was said (by Tan Sri Musa). As I see it, I have always maintained that we have only one general and not two. There is no alternative ... we have only one general. What is important is that if they had made mistakes, that is their doing. As far as I am concerned, I understand my job and what is required of me. I am no more than a deputy. My job is merely to assist the Prime Minister. I have plenty of work to do and that is what I intend to do ... no more than that.

Q: On wooing youngsters to join Umno, do you think political education is sufficient to rope them in or more needed to be done to give them the confidence that the party is heading for a change?

A: It cannot be denied that the younger generation has high hopes for the future. But one aspect we have to bear in mind is that Umno can bring

big changes for the people such as the New Economic Policy and Vision 2020. Vision 2020 was designed to face the future challenges. We must work towards the objectives of Vision 2020 and have faith in it. Only then the younger generation will have faith in you. But if we only talk and our promises are mere rhetoric, we will be unsuccessful. A lot of effort is needed.

Q: Datuk Seri, where do you go from here? Do you hope to become Umno deputy president or the Prime Minister of Malaysia? The people want to know.

A: What is important to me now is that I must continue to serve the party well and I should carry out all responsibilities given to me with dedication. It is up to the party to determine my position. As a wakil rakyat, my constituents will decide on my fate. I think it will all depend on what I do. Like people say, if you wish to get padi, then grow padi and you will get rice. You should not grow lallang.

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