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Abdullah-Mahathir

"MR CLEAN" ABDULLAH BADAWI A BOOST FOR MAHATHIR

MELBOURNE, June 9 (Bernama) -- A major factor in Malaysia's renewed confidence in the Mahathir government is the "Mr Clean" image of new Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawai, according to a senior Australian journalist.

Just back from a visit to Kuala Lumpur, Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of "The Australian" newspaper, said one reason "the Malaysian Government is doing a bit better is Abdullah himself".

"He is not in the least charismatic, unlike Dr Mahathir and Anwar (Ibrahim). Rather, he is solid, reliable and affable. He is famously the "Mr Clean" of Malaysian politics. He also has impeccable Islamic credentials," Sheridan said.

"Some Malaysian analysts draw an Australian comparison, pointing out that the dull John Howard triumphed over the visionary Paul Keating," Sheridan said.

In an interview, Abdullah admitted to Sheridan that the sacking and jailing of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had politically damaged Dr Mahathir. But, Abdullah said, Dr Mahathir's standing was now recovering "as people came to understand the facts of the Anwar case more fully and as the Malaysian economy recovered".

Abdullah told Sheridan that he believed the "main reason support for the Mahathir government is firming is Malaysia's economic recovery".

The deputy prime minister was quoted as saying: "We are happy and confident that things are going well for us. The exchange controls have yielded the results we anticipated. Domestic and international confidence have been restored to the Malaysian economy."

Abdullah went on to cite the buoyant share market, the heavy trade surplus, the return to positive growth after recession last year and, most recently, a successful bond issue heavily over-subscribed in the US as evidence that the economy was bouncing back.

"People have less reason to accuse us of not managing the economy well. They particularly accused the PM and said the measures he took would not work.

"The success we've had has proved the critics wrong," Abdullah was reported as saying.

When asked about his top portfolio priority, Abdullah, who is also the Home Minister, said: "Restoring the reputation of the police."

Abdullah said he believed that because of Anwar's famous black eye, sustained in a police beating in September, the whole of the Malaysian police had suffered from the actions of one man.

"It (the assault) was not sanctioned by the police, it was not sanctioned by the law, it's a criminal offence," Abdullah said.

-- BERNAMA

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