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Time to close ranks and get on with the job at hand

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WITH the appointment of the new Deputy Prime Minister, other Cabinet changes and the postponement of Umno elections, it is hoped that efforts and energies will now be focused on the economy and improving the country's image.

In appointing Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his deputy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has followed tradition. In the past, Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Ghafar Baba and Dr Mahathir himself were appointed to the Deputy Prime Minister's post when they were Umno vice presidents.

This point may have escaped some observers abroad who expressed "surprise" at the appointment. They point to the highly publicised fact that Dr Mahathir broke the fast at Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's house. This is nothing unusual as the Prime Minister breaks his fast with numerous people during the month, and nothing is made out of these "events". It does not mean that each time the Prime Minister visits someone or breaks fast in another's house that the individual or individuals are in line for an appointment.

The observers nevertheless noted that the appointment of Abdullah as Deputy Prime Minister and that of Tun Daim Zainuddin as the First Finance Minister should instil greater confidence among foreigners and the business community both at home and abroad.

Abdullah or Pak Lah (as he is affectionately called) also has a Mr Nice Guy and Mr Clean image which will be useful in bridging the gap and uniting Umno members and those at the grassroots. His easy, unassuming and gentle manner endears him to young and old.

Abdullah is not new to politics as Umno politics runs in his veins. His father, Datuk Ahmad Badawi was a founder member of the organisation. Pak Lah's easy manner, even temperament, his friendship and good standing among the diplomatic corp and the foreign community including Asean foreign ministers, Organisation of Islamic Countries, Group of Fifteen (G-15) and in other parts of the world will be useful and helpful for the tasks ahead.

Now that the much rumoured and debated appointment has been made, it is time for all to close ranks and work for the betterment of the party and country. The party, Government and the economy have all experienced difficult times in recent months.

Much damage had been done to our political image and while the economy is on the mend it requires close monitoring, greater attention, knowledge and expertise of the ever changing world economic and financial environment.

Thus, the return of Daim the "stingy Finance Minister" to the Ministry at this crucial period of the country's economic situation is viewed as a positive move.

Undoubtedly as Special Functions Minister and Executive Director of the National Economic Action Council (Neac) Daim had more than enough on his plate. But he nevertheless will have to marshall all his skills and energies to help steer the economy out of its worst recession. His business acumen has and will continue to be relied upon to pull the economy out of its present difficulties.

While the economy is being attended to by Daim in his capacity as Finance Minister and Minister of Special Functions and Home Affairs is

looked after by Abdullah, as Home Minister, the Prime Minister can spend more time explaining the situation, both political and economic, around the country.

There is much that those in the far flung parts of the country need to be told. The rumour mill has been working overtime and misinformation has been spreading faster than wild fire. Even so, the job of explaining the situation should not be left to the Prime Minister alone.

Dr Mahathir has made his rounds and will do so again, as he said over the weekend. But it is also the duty of all Cabinet members, old and new, as well as party leaders to close ranks and do their job. It does not matter whether they are given publicity in the print and electronic media. What is important is that the job gets done and is done to the best of ones ability.

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