

Pak Lah: Not easy to emulate Dr Mahathir

STAR 20 NOV 2002

By SHAHANA AZ HABIB

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says it would not be easy to succeed Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister.

The Deputy Prime Minister said he could not be compared with Dr Mahathir, who has been the leader of the Government for 22 years.

"I don't have that kind of experience but we share a lot of things in common," he said during the *In Conversation* programme on TV3, which was aired last night.

The hosts of the pre-recorded programme were TV3's News and Current Affairs senior general manager Datuk Chamil Wariya, Indonesia's RCTI executive producer Roy Tindage, Philippines' ABN-CBN chief correspondent Korina Sanchez and Thailand's iTV foreign correspondent Chairat Thomya.

Abdullah said among the things he shared in common with Dr Mahathir were policies such as a business-friendly Government, privatisation, economic growth with equitable distribution, Vision 2020, national unity and power sharing in Government.

"I can't imitate Dr Mahathir's style - certainly not. He has his style, I will have my style but the objec-

tives will be the same," he added.

Abdullah believed most of the country's policies were good.

He said as a member of the Cabinet, he was party to whatever decision taken because the Cabinet worked on the basis of consensus and collective responsibility.

Pointing out that the National Economic Policy (NEP) was conceptualised and launched by Tun Abdul Razak, Abdullah noted that succeeding leaders followed through the 20-year policy, including Dr Mahathir, who implemented the second 10 years of the NEP.

He said while no change was made to the policy's objective to eradicate poverty and restructure society, the method of implementation, however, differed according to the leader and "new needs" and aspirations of the time.

Therefore, Abdullah added that after he takes over as Prime Minister, if circumstances dictated that a policy needed to be "suitable adjusted", it would be a folly if he did not do so.

He dismissed the notion that he was a "reluctant leader" saying this was only a perception.

"When the time comes and Dr Mahathir hands the leader-

ship to me, I will accept it. I will perform and carry out duties of the new post," he said.

Abdullah admitted that taking on the job required some form of mental preparation.

He said as a captain of a ship, one had the option whether to stay onboard and allow the ship to drift to take you anywhere it liked or whether to navigate the ship to its destination.

"I would want to navigate," he added.

Abdullah was also asked how he felt about his appointment after Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sacked from the post.

He replied he was surprised to be picked but was happy because it was a promotion.

"I felt good because I was promoted. Anybody would want a promotion. But the next thing I thought was 'Oh my God, it's going to be a lot of work. There's a lot that needs to be done'," he said.

To a question on whether as Prime Minister, he would be less outspoken than Dr Mahathir, Abdullah who is due to take over the helm in October, said "well maybe".

Abdullah said an assessment on his style could only be made after he sat in the (Prime Minister's) chair and

started doing things.

To a question, he said people had so many perceptions of him.

He said some had described him as Mr Nice Guy but after he detained some people under the Internal Security Act recently, "they say Mr Nice is not nice after all".

On PAS, Abdullah said it was a very serious opposition for Umno and Barisan Nasional and thus should not be dismissed as a party not worthy of much attention.

Saying that Islam had a very strong influence on the Malays, he viewed PAS seriously.

He said it was the biggest opposition party, with very strong members and the only opposition party with two state governments.

"I consider it very important for me to bear in mind that PAS is to promote Islam and are doing their best to gain support even to exploit people with the teachings of Islam.

"If Islam is not 'handled' properly in the sense that it is promoted wrongly by not providing true teachings of Islam, there can be a lot of confusion.

"Any tendency towards exploiting Islam in ways that can make the Malays extreme can also spell a lot of problems for a multiracial country like Malaysia," he said.