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Abdullah-Premiership

ABDULLAH TO TAKE MALAYSIA TO ITS DESTINATION

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that come October 2003, when he takes over the helm from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he would want to "navigate" and take the "ship" to its destination.

He said that when the time comes and the prime minister hands over the leadership to him, he would accept it and carry out the responsibility of the new post.

Dismissing perceptions that he was a reluctant leader, Abdullah said that as a leader and head of the government, the role would be very much different than as a cabinet minister.

"I put it this way...if you're asked to be the captain of the ship, you'll have to decide whether you'd like to just allow the ship to drift and you'd just stay on board...you're the captain, the ship will take you anywhere it likes... or whether you'll want to navigate and take the ship to its destination. I would want to navigate, naturally," he said in an interview with four Asean journalists on the "In Conversation" programme aired over TV3 tonight.

Abdullah fielded questions on a range of subjects including his preparation after being named as Malaysia's next prime minister, Asean, Islam and terrorism as well as topics on the political, security and international spheres.

Dr Mahathir announced in June that he would be quitting his political and government posts after the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) in October, next year.

Abdullah, however, said that he would have a lot of concerns as it was not easy for him to succeed Dr Mahathir, who has been the head of the Malaysian government for the past 22 years.

"That you cannot compare me with him. I do not have that kind of experience but we do share a lot of things in common," he said.

Stressing a point that every leader has his very own style, he said that he would continue with the country's existing policies including the Vision 2020, Malaysia Incorporated and a government that is business-friendly to further spur the country's economic growth.

"So we share a lot of things in common and of course the Vision 2020 that Dr Mahathir promoted. I would like to see the Vision 2020 succeed but I cannot imitate Dr Mahathir's style...he has his style and I will have my style but the objectives will be the same," he said.

To a question as to whether he envisaged any differences between himself and Dr Mahathir, Abdullah said: "Any differences...perhaps the way we do things. No two men can do the same thing and have the same style. Any differences would not be in (government) objectives and not in (its) policies."

He said that as the cabinet practises collective responsibility and makes decision on the consensus basis, any changes of government policies would depend on circumstances.

Asked whether he would be less outspoken than Dr Mahathir, he said: "Maybe...that is what everybody says, that Dr Mahathir is very outspoken. I do not know yet but I've yet started to speak out as a prime minister. So, I do not know what I am really going to do, what people are going to describe me but I always believes that when you do things or when you speak, you'll have to be effective, you'll have to get what you want...in

other words, you have to succeed in achieving the objectives, styles may differ," he said.

Abdullah, one of the most loyal to Umno, never leaving the party since becoming a member at the age of 18, has his up and downs in politics. He has also been in and out of the cabinet.

Asked on his feelings when he was first appointed as deputy prime minister and whether he expected to be respected and trusted by the people, especially Umno members, Abdullah, who is Umno deputy president, said that he felt good and also happy as it was a promotion.

"So I get myself promoted and the next thing, I thought... oh my God, there'll be a lot of work that needs to be done...that's all that I thought immediately.

"I have not been thinking what you've been mentioning (to be respected and trusted)...it did not cross my mind at all, it's just that I've been promoted. Thank God...of course I feel happy, I was surprised also that I was the one picked by Dr Mahathir to be his deputy and the rest, at the uppermost of my mind is that, thank God, for there'll be more responsibility," he said.

On remarks about him being "Mr Nice Man" and of possessing a moderate style with an Islamic background and that he has the best credential to be the future head in fighting against terrorism, Abdullah said that he would not know.

"People have so many perceptions of me before. They said I am a nice man but later on, after I've detained a few people, they say that that Mr Nice Man is not nice any more," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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