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Walk softly and carry a big stick

Munir Majid

But what would he do?

WOULD there be a continuity of policy if a different style was brought to its implementation? In theory yes, but with two caveats. The style must not allow a divergence from policy and it must not allow any foot-dragging.

It is being put about in certain quarters that Abdullah might not be firm enough not to allow that to happen. The irony is that this point is often raised by those who have in the past expressed dismay at Dr Mahathir's allegedly authoritarian style.

This leads to the suspicion that whatever the situation and whosoever the person, these wags are always going to express doubts, uncertainty and fears.

Actually, they would do better to come up with ideas on what kind of political and economic policies Malaysia should be pursuing in this digital and highly competitive age.

I do know Abdullah is not impervious to advice and different perspectives people may have, if they had them, instead of being the doubting brigade.

I do know also that Abdullah has clear ideas about future challenges and how to confront them.

The thing is he is not yet the Prime Minister and the transition to October 2003 is a relatively long period, even if he is the Prime Minister to be.

He cannot be presumptuous, including in the naming of his choice as deputy just now; yet he is being asked to come out explicitly on so many things which are the remit of the Prime Minister. It is really too much to ask of him.

However, on the positive side, the period of transition provides a good opportunity for the PM and DPM to work out a delineation of responsibilities, both political and administrative, so that the ground is well prepared for a smooth transition, as well as avoiding pitfalls which political opportunists might want to exploit.

It must be remembered that Abdullah has been in the administration for a long time, starting from his days in the civil service, where he was at one time secretary to the meetings of the National Operations Council (NOC) which led the nation out of the black days of the May 1969 racial riots and navigated the country back to democratic rule.

He saw leadership at its best and the determination of policies which form the foundation of Malaysia today. Under Dr Mahathir, he has seen the country propelled forward, based on that foundation, to a height never before achieved which is the envy of many a nation.

He has seen all forms of pressure, of the destructive and constructive kind. Abdullah cannot be better prepared, when his time comes.