

# Pak Lah:

by **REHMAN RASHID**

## The Prime Manager

outside Masjid Negara was cordoned off long before anyone could get near the place.

No one had to be arrested for illegal assembly, for there was never the possibility of illegal assembly.

This might indicate another difference in style between Mahathir and Abdullah. Dr M was a corrective surgeon. Pak Lah may prefer prevention to cure. He is a man of peace. Any threat to peace will be dealt with in such a way as to keep the peace. What that implies for the prospects of any liberal review of the Internal Security Act should be clear.

Abdullah would much prefer applying the powers of his office to running this enormously expanded country bequeathed him by Mahathir. He will need all the technocrats and professionals he can muster. He is not without resources in this regard. Mahathir's 22-year administration ensured the thorough maturation of not one but two generations of Malaysian talent.

The expensively cultivated human resources of the New

Economic Policy have ripened. Malaysia's hugely expanded corporate sector, having reaped the whirlwind of excess in the 1990s, should now reap the harvest of experience.

Transferring the stewardship of Malaysia Inc. from politicians to professional managers should be an imperative of the new administration. Mahathir erected the political force-fields to shield the creation of this country's massive new hard assets. Abdullah would wish to oversee their profitability, for which political husbandry is not as useful as good management.

The mechanisms of Malaysian governance remain sound, no matter how they are operated. Speaking to the local Oxbridge Society earlier this year, Abdullah expressed exasperation with people always asking him about his "vision" for the country. "I have always given the same answer," he said. "My vision for Malaysia is Vision 2020."

Mahathir's ineradicable legacy will remain the keel of the next administration, upon which Pak Lah will consolidate the

ship of state.

Rather than look to any radical policy innovations, the Abdullah Administration

will be mea-

sured

more in

how well

Malay-

sia's pre-

sent insti-

tutions,

systems

and pro-

cesses work

to keep the good

numbers climbing and

the bad ones down.

Pak Lah's first year

in office will be no

cakewalk. General

elections must be held

next year. The Barisan

Nasional's targets are

clear, ambitious – and

not assured. Then must

come Umno's electoral

assembly, to confer upon

Abdullah the party mandate

he has long been prevented

from receiving – and to affirm

his own succession.

Abdullah still has miles to go before he can rest easy in the embrace of his party, the government and the nation. Undoubtedly, he will commence as he would wish to continue for the duration of his tenure, with care and deliberation, minimum fuss and maximum effectiveness.