

# Nation's hopes on PM for a dynamic future

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by **P. Gunasegaram**

*Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Man never is, but always to be blest – Alexander Pope, 17th century poet*

LAST week was different: you could almost smell it, touch it in the air. It heralded the first week of a fresh era – a new prime minister after 22 years – new hopes, new aspirations and new expectations for a better country, for a better future.

Heavy lies the burden on the shoulders of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or simply Pak Lah, in his own words “this humble servant of God”, the man who will now take us forward into the future.

Already, there are those, who are purportedly close to him, who point to his presence at the signing of this, that and the other, and wave these at everyone's noses to push themselves to the forefront as the preferred people in the new-era.

These are the people who seek to show that they were close to him, loyal during the good times and the bad, especially the bad, and who now want their dues from that loyalty.

Then there are others, those favoured in the past, who want to maintain their favoured status and transfer it to the new administration lock, stock and barrel.

For these new loyalists and the old loyalists, Pak Lah is now the man of the moment and the foreseeable future.

He is pursued with a vigour that rivals that of the most persistent suitor for an attractive bride and there is nothing now that Pak Lah can do wrong, just as his predecessor could do no wrong.

Fine so far. But it's uncannily like 1981 when his predecessor was appointed PM and the words “bersih, cekap dan amanah” (clean, efficient and trustworthy) resounded through the portals of the public imagination not long after; but more than 20 years later, we have not quite made it there.

If we had, would there be a need to make the almost similar clarion call for honesty, integrity and fairness?

Pak Lah's words will be examined to see if they will be matched by his deeds. That, after all, would be the acid test.

He has chosen as his first step the reduction of red tape, which he identifies as a source of corruption because there will be

Count on an innumerable number of eyes to come Pak Lah's way just as they did for the previous prime Minister. Count on a new sea of nodding heads which will hang onto his every word and will seek to put his every bidding into action, so that they will be counted among the favoured ones.

But the rakyat, who can never really be fooled, although their so called representatives often show fawning and hypocritical adulation of leaders for their own ends, will have all eyes on Pak Lah. And these will be the eyes that matter.

If in these eyes Pak Lah shows his mettle, and resists all the temptations of office and takes this country a few notches up to a deserved place as a nation which values its people, then he would be well on the way to fulfil his self-set aim of living up to the expectations of his Maker.

For how well a nation, through its elected government, regards its people is the true test of a country's maturity and a clear and real indication of whether a nation can progress materially, morally and spiritually, all at the same time.

One week is a short time. But in that one week, Pak Lah's words and deeds have given cause for hope. He, going by his speech, has set three things as his code of conduct – honesty, integrity and fairness.

Those are admirable qualities whose value has plummeted these couple of decades to the point that becoming rich through dishonest means among people who lack ability, integrity and honour has become virtually acceptable.

His first post-Cabinet-meeting press conference as prime minister saw him stressing again these aspects of corruption and his intention to promote good governance overall through transparency and accountability.

And he repeated his call for everyone to work with him, not least his cabinet colleagues.

payment to hasten the process. And he has talked about setting time limits for the approval process.

That is a clever, although small, first step because it will rock no major boats. It's the front end which feels the brunt and in any case, who can oppose such a move?

The rakyat will welcome it. It will reduce the tendency towards corruption by increasing government efficiency. But even that will be no easy matter; much is in the execution.

But at some point, he may have to turn his sights on the big guns, those close and dear to him, those for whom patronage and cronyism, if not outright corruption, have become common practice. And he may have to turn against long-ingrained practices.

Would he, for instance, cut the links between politics and big business?

That would not be easy to do but a man of God will not flinch from the task. Before that, he may need a mandate from the people and to put right-minded personnel in key positions.

He will have to manoeuvre very carefully. It is telling that he chooses to keep the finance minister's and home minister's portfolios – and that he has yet to announce who will be his deputy.

The flame of idealism burns brightest at the beginning of power but the persistent, gusting, swirling, corrupting winds of temptation extinguishes all but the greatest as history has shown over and over again.

But it is in the nature of man to hope and hope against hope that this time it will be different.

Pak Lah, if honesty, integrity and fairness are indeed the hallmark of your stewardship as PM, we more than wish you well – we accept your invitation to work with you. And we know you have a tough task ahead.

*P. Gunasegaram is editor-at-large at The Edge Comments: [feedback@bizedge.com](mailto:feedback@bizedge.com)*

## Abdullah's code of conduct – honesty, integrity and fairness