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S'pore-Abdullah

ABDULLAH A STEADY AND UNFLAPPABLE PRESENCE: AUTHOR

SINGAPORE, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- While many Malaysians will miss Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's high-adrenalin style, the newly-installed Prime Minister is a steady and unflappable presence, according to Kuala Lumpur-based lawyer and author Karim Raslan.

After 22 years of the "good doctor's rule", Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will act as a conciliator for a country still grappling with the pressure of rapid globalisation and urbanisation, he said in his article published in the Today newspaper.

As the scion of a respected family of Islamic scholars, Abdullah (affectionately called Pak Lah), is well positioned to tackle the all-powerful Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) head-on, he said.

"Fortunately, Mr Abdullah's diffidence masks a surprising breadth of experience, both as a civil servant and a politician."

In his tribute, Karim notes that Abdullah, having grown up on the cosmopolitan island of Penang, has also an intuitive understanding of Malaysia's delicate racial make-up.

Moreover, he recognises the need to balance reform and renewal with the country's innate conservatism, adds Karim, who is the author of 'Journeys through South-east Asia: Ceritalah 2' published last year.

"Pak Lah knows, without having to be told, that in Malaysia, change takes place in an evolutionary manner -- slowly and steadily. Ordinary Malaysians recoil from revolutionary ideas and policies -- a fear of instability unifies the nation," he says.

Karim also foresees cross-straits relations improving as Abdullah, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and later, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, develop the one-on-one relations.

"The leaders and their advisors from both sides must step back from the meddling politicians, bureaucrats and journalists, and instead, tap the private sector of both sides of the Causeway because the business world is entirely supportive of greater integration and stronger bilateral ties."

For now, the Malaysian lawyer expects most of Dr Mahathir's policies to remain unchanged, and in fact, there will be few changes until Abdullah has secured his own electoral mandate.

"If he is to wield power confidently, Pak Lah must deliver a strong electoral victory.

"Patience and self-restraint -- the hallmarks of Mr Abdullah's career -- will stand him in good stead in his handling, both of his predecessor and of the selection of his deputy, who will help strengthen Umno in the run-up to next year's polls," said Karim.

Similarly, as the challenges facing Malaysia shift and change, Abdullah would respond in kind, "altering the good doctor's previous policy prescriptions if need be," he said.

"Pak Lah's common sense and a low-key temperament will minimise the differences. But at the end of the day, he will be his own man.

"He will act when he needs to and strike hard against those that challenge the country's security or its painstakingly wrought multi-racial balance."

In the months to come, "we will begin to see his determination and intransigence as he becomes more comfortable with the mantle of power and the premiership," Karim added.

-- BERNAMA

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