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Politics (Yearender)

CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IN MALAYSIA TAKES CENTRESTAGE THIS YEAR

By: Jamaluddin Mohamad

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 17 (Bernama) -- The change of leadership in Malaysia took centrestage this year -- with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi taking over as the fifth Prime Minister from long-serving Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Datuk Seri Abdullah also took over the leadership of the ruling Barisan Nasional and is also acting President of Malaysia's dominant party Umno which is the backbone of the BN.

Datuk Seri Abdullah succeeded Dr Mahathir when the latter resigned from all his government and political posts on Oct 31 after being at the helm for 22 years. Datuk Seri Abdullah was also endorsed unanimously as BN chairman by all component parties when the BN Supreme Council held its meeting a week later.

It was a smooth transition of power in the government and party -- reflecting the country's growing political maturity.

Other highlights in the country's political scenario this year were the changes in leadership of three other BN component parties.

The MCA also changed hands on May 23 from President Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Deputy President Datuk Lim Ah Lek to Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy respectively.

With the resignation of Dr Ling who led the MCA for 17 years and Datuk Lim, problems within the party were resolved.

The transition of power went smoothly at the end of the day during the Chinese Zodiac Year of the Goat.

However it was not all plain-sailing for another BN component party, Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) when its President Datuk Amar Leo Moggie stepped down on June 25.

The 20-year-old party was deregistered on Dec 5 by the Registrar of Societies (ROS) after failing to provide a satisfactory reply to the show-cause letter sent by the registrar.

It all started when the PBDS was left with two presidents -- Datuk Seri Daniel Tajem and Datuk Seri Dr James Masing -- as well as two supreme councils, after Datuk Amar Moggie stepped down.

Datuk Seri Tajem and Dr Masing each claimed to be the rightful president until the ROS officially recognised the former as the president after finding that the party's Triennial Delegates Conference in Bintulu on July 25 led by the latter was illegal and invalid.

The ROS also issued a show-cause letter to Datuk Seri Tajem to explain why the party should not be disregistered as it was said to have contravened the party constitution during its Triennial General Meeting in Santubong on July 26 and 27.

The question of where to "park" the 14 PBDS elected representatives will be made at the next BN Supreme Council Meeting.

Last year, on Nov 5, ROS deregistered the 41-year-old Sarawak National Party (Snap) following its failure to resolve its internal crisis.

Following its deregistration, the party's former vice President Datuk William Mawan formed the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) which was accepted into the BN fold in May this year.

In Sabah Datuk Musa Aman of Umno took over as Chief Minister from Datuk Chong Kah Kiat of the Liberal Democratic Party on March 27 this year under the state's unique rotation system.

What happened in other BN component parties did not really steal this year's political limelight.

The Barisan Nasional also celebrated its 50 years of power-sharing on Sept 20. The BN has 13 members at present with the exclusion of PBDS and the inclusion of SPDP.

"It is a great formula of power-sharing that has lasted until now and brought about prosperity, stability and peace to the country," said Gerakan President Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

When talking about politics, the biggest question on everybody's mind is when will be the next general election as the present term of the Federal Parliament and state assemblies in Peninsular Malaysia will expire on Dec 20 next year while the Sabah Assembly's mandate will end on April 12 next year.

On the opposition front, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) unveiled its blueprint for an Islamic State last month, which found strong opposition not only from the BN but also from other opposition parties such as the DAP.

It is an open secret that the so-called opposition pact among PAS, Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) and Keadilan is very loose and weak compared to the BN coalition.

The PRM and Keadilan struggle had not really touched the hearts and minds of the majority of the people, political observers said.

The opposition parties are expected to face an uphill task in the coming general election as the BN juggernaut gets ready to crush them in the polls.

-- BERNAMA

JM MFJ AAM