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Samsudin-Abdullah

CHIEF SECRETARY: ABDULLAH WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT

By: Santha Oorjitham

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's fifth prime minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, will continue the country's focus on physical development, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman said.

The head of the civil service has known Abdullah since their first jobs in the Public Service Department (PSD) at Rumah Persekutuan in Kuala Lumpur.

"Development will still be very high on his agenda," Samsudin said, noting that as chairman of the Competitiveness Committee, Abdullah is tasked with ensuring that the country remains competitive.

And as chairman of the Cabinet Special Committee on Integrity of the Civil Service, Abdullah would also "focus on the moral and ethical aspects of development, on the need for civil servants to uphold the highest level of integrity," Samsudin said in an interview with Bernama, here.

Abdullah's grandfather, Sheikh Abdullah Fahim, was known as an ulama and Quran teacher while his father, Datuk Haji Ahmad Badawi, served as deputy head of UMNO Youth.

Abdullah himself attended a religious secondary school and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Islamic Studies at the University of Malaya.

Samsudin reckoned that Abdullah's family background and education had had an impact on the new prime minister.

"It was observable during his tenure as deputy prime minister. His religious values show through in his decisions, his views and his approach.

"A lot of people would find him more approachable... someone who smiles all the time and is willing to listen. I do have a sense that he likes to build on consensus," he said.

When Samsudin joined the PSD as an assistant secretary in April 1969, Abdullah had already been in the post for five years.

The newcomer looked up to his senior: "He was very articulate, participated very well at meetings and was willing to give his views."

Samsudin particularly remembers that Abdullah was brave about voicing his opinion even when the chairman (the Director of Establishment, the late Samad Yim) "did not seem too happy" with the different viewpoints.

They met again in 1982 when Abdullah was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department and Samsudin was head of Finance and Account Management at the National Institute of Public Administration (Intan).

As the new prime minister, Datuk Seri (now Tun) Dr Mahathir Mohamad had introduced the Look East Policy, the inculcation of Islamic values in the civil service, work improvement teams, Quality Control, name-tags and punch-card for civil servants.

"Datuk Seri Abdullah was the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department responsible for the civil service," said Samsudin.

"As someone from the civil service, he had a lot of ideas on how to improve, modernise and make things more efficient. He was responsible for seeing that the ideas were implemented. Intan and Mampu (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit) became the vehicles to facilitate implementation of these policies relating to the civil service," he said.

One-stop bill payment agencies were one of Abdullah's ideas, he said.

Until then, the public had to pay electricity, water, telephone and other bills from state authorities at different outlets.

Abdullah suggested that all the service providers accept payment of

each other's bills.

"It was very significant because it provided an example of thinking and doing things differently, to bring about efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service and make things easier for the public." said Samsudin, who headed the taskforce to implement the programme.

Abdullah's early days in the civil service provide a glimpse of the leader that he would become.

His two months as acting prime minister last year, when Dr Mahathir was on leave, showed him to be "a prime minister who will do the job", Samsudin added.

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