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Mahathir-Boss

DR MAHATHIR, A BOSS PAR EXCELLENCE

By: Sajad Hussain

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 26 (Bernama) -- As a boss, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is very considerate and appreciative of his staff, according to his former long serving private secretary Datuk Abdul Rahim Abdul Razak.

Being very approachable, this puts the staff at ease at work and thus they become very productive, Abdul Rahim told Bernama in an interview recently.

"The Prime Minister is very knowledgeable and as such the staff are also able to learn a lot from him," said Abdul Rahim who first joined Dr Mahathir as his Private Secretary in 1978.

In his years of service, he has never seen the Prime Minister raised his voice or scolded a staff.

"If only all bosses can be like him, employees would love to go to work and there would be very little truancy," said Abdul Rahim who is now the special assistant to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

While being considerate, Dr Mahathir was also very firm and result-orientated and he expected his staff also be likewise, Abdul Rahim said.

According to him, senior civil servants dreaded when Dr Mahathir took out his little notebook at post cabinet meetings every Wednesday afternoon because it contained all his observations and queries on the functioning of the various departments.

Dr Mahathir had a penchant for details and "could comment on little things..like trees not properly trimmed or a leaning lamp post and potholed roads.."

According to Abdul Rahim whenever Dr Mahathir was in town, he would come to office punctually at 8am, take a one-half hour lunch break and continue working until 6pm.

He could clear all his files for the day and every file would be minuted very clearly and hence it was easy for the staff to follow up, according to Abdul Rahim.

When overseas, Dr Mahathir also worked at the punishing pace and absorbed as much as he could during fact-finding tours and brought back ideas to be implemented at home.

Abdul Rahim said nothing made Dr Mahathir more happy than to see improvement in the livelihood of Malaysians.

While Dr Mahathir would never shed tears when struck with personal tragedy, he had cried openly when lamenting on the plight of poor Malaysians and how they were not responding to the government's call for improvement.

"His extreme love for his country and race was above his family and relatives," said Abdul Rahim, adding that as a family man, Dr Mahathir treated his family very lovingly.

Malaysia's founding father and first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had great respect and love for Dr Mahathir despite their differences in opinion, said Abdul Rahim who related on incident to illustrate this.

"When the Tunku was ill in hospital, I went to pay him a visit. At that time he was unable to see clearly, but was still very alert. Tunku asked me who I was and I told him that. I was the grandson of his old friend Haji Abdul Raof of Kuala Ketil, Kedah."

"To this the Tunku responded and asked what I had been doing.

"I told him that I was working for Dr Mahathir and immediately he said, 'Jaga dia baik baik, kerja betul betul' (look after him well and work properly). Two weeks later the Tunku passed away."

Abdul Rahim, 52, considers himself very lucky for having served both Dr Mahathir and Abdullah for many years.

"I thank Allah for this good fortune as I am one civil servant who has the honour to serve both these great personalities for many years," he said.

According to Abdul Rahim, Abdullah is scheduled to be sworn in as the new prime minister on Oct 31 in the first week of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Coincidentally Dr Mahathir was sworn in as Malaysia's fourth prime minister during Ramadan 1981.

"I see this as a very good omen for the future prosperity of our beloved nation," said Abdul Rahim.

Whether or not he would make it into the Malaysia Book of Records, Abdul Rahim has certainly earned a rare distinction as a civil servant who, in his own words, "has served two deputy prime ministers who went on to become prime ministers."

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SAJ RYN ABG