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Abdullah-Visit (Wrap-up)

ABDULLAH'S FIRST AGENDA TO OVERCOME FARMER'S WOES

BUTTERWORTH, Nov 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi returned to the federal capital this afternoon after spending his first two days as the fifth Prime Minister meeting with farmers and other people in his home state.

He and his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, left on board a special aircraft from the Bayan Lepas International Airport in Penang at 3.10pm.

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain as well as Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir led some 200 people including Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders and senior government officers in bidding farewell to Abdullah and his wife.

Penang State Mufti Datuk Haji Hassan Ahmad read special prayers before the Prime Minister boarded the aircraft.

What is interesting about his first visit as Prime Minister is that Abdullah had chosen to visit the farmers and livestock breeders first instead of corporate figures and senior government officials after being sworn in as Prime Minister on Friday.

At a function today, he announced that the government had allocated RM32 million to provide immediate flood relief aid to Kedah and Penang farmers and livestock breeders whose crops and animals were destroyed in the recent floods.

At his request, the Agriculture Ministry had approved an immediate flood relief aid to more than 4,000 farmers in Penang and more than 8,000 farmers in Kedah to ease their burden, especially padi farmers who had to keep to the planting schedule.

Dr Koh in his speech at the aid presentation ceremony said this showed that Abdullah was a leader who was deeply concerned about the welfare of farmers and rural dwellers.

"He gives priority to the public especially the poor and not to the corporate sector. This is Pak Lah," he said.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi said Abdullah gave emphasis on efforts to develop the agriculture sector as a lucrative source of income for the rural dwellers.

It was obvious from the welcoming reception he received upon his return here yesterday that the people were very happy with his appointment as Prime Minister when more than 30,000 people had gathered at the old terminal of the Bayan Lepas International Airport to greet him.

His homecoming to Kepala Batas to seek the blessing of his mother, Datuk Kailan Hassan, one day after his appointment showed his loyalty and respect for his mother, and his modesty in sharing his happiness with the people in his kampung.

In his speech to the thousands of people in Kepala Batas and the surrounding areas, Abdullah said the post of Prime Minister for him was not an honour for himself but rather a trust and responsibility.

Besides fulfilling his obligation as a good son to the mother and family, he also wanted to share his happiness with the grassroots who had all this time given him so much support, assistance and cooperation in his political career.

The people who had come in droves to greet his homecoming said they were impressed by his modesty, friendliness, soft nature and respect for his elders.

Despite the heavy rain, the Prime Minister was still willing to spend time to address the people, and the audience too were not bothered by the rain.

In his speeches to the people in Kepala Batas and at the Bayan Lepas International Airport, he had thanked them for supporting him right up to his current position.

Abdullah also said he was thankful for inheriting such an effective and successful government, as well as the most developed among the developing countries due to the leadership of Dr Mahathir, and expressed his determination to take the country to even greater heights.

Abdullah called on the people to "work together with me, and not for me," to ensure that the excellent era of Dr Mahathir could be continued.

Koh, when met at the Bayan Lepas International Airport after bidding farewell to the Prime Minister, said Abdullah had expressed awe at the rousing welcome given by the people when he arrived yesterday.

"We are confident that with the solid support of the people and civil service, the Prime Minister will achieve excellence based on the foundation built by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he said.

Koh also reminded the people of Penang that Abdullah was Prime Minister for the whole population of Malaysia and his tasks were not only focused on Penang.

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