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PAK LAH PERFECT ANTIDOTE TO FUNDAMENTALISTS, SAYS AMBASSADOR GHAZZALI

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Handpicked successor Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, a respected Islamic scholar, is the "perfect antidote" to the fundamentalists who preach hate and violence, Malaysia's Ambassador to the United States, Datuk Ghazzali Sheikh Abdul Khalid, said here yesterday.

In a letter to the Editor of Washington Times, Ghazzali disputed a Times article which described Abdullah as a "drab...former Islamic student and career politician," who has generated uncertainty.

"The uncertainty belongs to the writers of the article. If they had followed closely for the past two decades, they would know that Mr Abdullah has all the experience to ascend to the top jobs, having served as Foreign Minister, Education Minister and now as Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister."

Known as "Mr Clean" for his personal honesty, integrity and intolerance for corruption, Abdullah is expected to lead the governing coalition into Malaysia's next general elections, said Ghazzali, in his letter which appeared on Tuesday.

"One thing is certain. If Mr Abdullah leads his party to victory and retains the Prime Ministership, he will not have to look over his shoulder at his predecessor," he wrote, noting that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad plans to step down.

The article titled "Can Malaysia Cope Without Mahathir - Autocrat to retire after 22 years," notes that Dr Mahathir does not want a special role in the Government such as the "Senior Minister" title accorded to his contemporary and old rival, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew.

Ghazzali shot back, "Now is that any way for a real autocrat to behave?"

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SH AHH SRI