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Abdullah-Gratitude

ABDULLAH DECLARES TUN DR MAHATHIR AS "BAPA PEMODENAN MALAYSIA"

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 21 (Bernama) -- In expressing the appreciation and gratitude of the Malaysian Government for the contributions of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the nation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi tonight declared his predecessor as "Bapa Pemodenan Malaysia" (Father of Malaysia's Modernisation).

Abdullah said the challenge now faced by Dr Mahathir's successors, starting with himself, was to consolidate the gains and great leaps that Malaysia had taken as a nation under his (Dr Mahathir's) leadership.

"We must manage our success properly for the sake of future generations. That is the best way to preserve his legacy and to ensure that his efforts and sacrifices have not been in vain.

"It is my privilege to carry on his efforts to take Malaysia to greater heights," he said at a special dinner in honour of Dr Mahathir who retired as the nation's fourth prime minister on Oct 31 after 22 years at the helm.

The event was graced by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid.

In his speech, Abdullah described how Dr Mahathir transformed Malaysia into a successful nation by implementing bold ideas in various fields that brought changes to its physical, mental and social landscape.

He said projects such as the national car project, the Petronas Twin Towers and the Formula One circuit in Sepang, among others, stood as testament to the courage and farsightedness of an enduring leader that was Dr Mahathir.

In the international arena, he said, Dr Mahathir realised that being a developing nation need not mean that it had to accept being marginalised.

"He has shown that being a developing nation does not mean that we cannot conduct ourselves with pride and dignity. His statesmanship has given Malaysia a reputation as a country that holds firm to principle and campaigns tirelessly for justice," Abdullah said.

Working alongside Dr Mahathir in the Cabinet for 19 and a half years, including as his deputy for almost five years, Abdullah said it had given him the cherished opportunity of observing the man at close quarters.

"I have been inspired by his vision, dedication, discipline and tenacity. I know that he is averse to being idolised. He is uncomfortable with adulation and excessive praise, and that he accepts accolades with shyness and reluctance.

"However, I hope that he will allow us this opportunity to express our appreciation and gratitude for his contributions to the nation," Abdullah said.

Also present was Dr Mahathir's wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, cabinet members, menteri besar and chief ministers, top federal and state government officials as well as members of the diplomatic corps.

Abdullah also took the opportunity to express deep appreciation to Dr Siti Hasmah who had never once complained about having to "lend" her husband to the country for 22 years.

"Her loyalty, support and love had enabled Tun Dr Mahathir to give full concentration on efforts to lead the country towards excellence," he said.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said Abdullah should be given sufficient time to carry out all government policies and programmes for national development as was the case with himself (Dr Mahathir) earlier.

"With permission, Pak Lah is older compared to me when I became prime minister before. But I'm confident he will be given enough time and opportunity and will be assisted by his cabinet colleagues as well as the country's administrative officers, so that all programmes proposed by him and approved by the cabinet can be implemented successfully," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was impossible to implement any programme instantly.

"Because nothing can be accomplished overnight -- today the decision is made and tomorrow it is accomplished. We are not God. We are ordinary people and we need time.

"And let's give our elected leaders time to lead this country," he said while expressing gratitude for being given 22 years to develop Malaysia to the best of his ability.

Dr Mahathir was also touched by the appreciation dinner held for him.

-- BERNAMA

MAM AO