

07 JAN 2004

Abdullah-Cabinet (News Analysis)

ABDULLAH A FAR-SIGHTED LEADER- POLITICAL SCIENTIST

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 7 (Bernama) -- The appointment of Deputy Prime Minister and the cabinet reshuffle announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today showed that the Prime Minister is a far-sighted

leader, a political scientist said today.

Associate Prof Dr Muhammad Mustafa Ishak of Universiti Utara Malaysia

(UUM) said Abdullah's move would ensure Barisan Nasional and Umno faced the general election with an optimistic mind.

"It has never happened before, a general election being called before

the Prime Minister appointing his deputy," he told Bernama.

Muhammad Mustafa, who is UUM Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs),

said the Prime Minister had maintained the party's unity and stability by

choosing Najib because Najib being the most senior vice-president had

strong grassroot support.

"Abdullah has kept the party's tradition by electing his deputy from

among the Umno vice-presidents," he said, adding that this would further

contribute to the party's unity and stability.

Muhammad Mustafa said Najib, 50, had always been seen as a leader

representing the young generation by virtue of his age and his role as the

former Umno Youth Chief.

He said this would surely have an impact on voters especially the young

generation as Najib was seen as a young and dynamic leader in Umno.

The Prime Minister must have taken this calculation into consideration

before appointing Najib, he said.

He said the 1999 General Election showed that the young generation were

quite "shy" in supporting BN.

Furthermore, Najib is quite well-known internationally and the country's standing in the international arena could be further enhanced

with his appointment.

"I travel overseas quite extensively and people whom I met seem to know

Abdullah and Najib. Najib probably in his capacity as Defence Minister and the son of a former Prime Minister," he said.

Abdullah, he said, also maintained stability by not dropping anyone from the cabinet.

The timing of the announcement really took many by surprise as "the Prime Minister kept the cards close to his chest" because many thought that Abdullah would have announced his deputy last year, he said.

"Don't underestimate Abdullah as he is a far sighted leader and he has learnt a lot from his predecessor (Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad). People cannot easily speculate on his (Abdullah's) political manoeuvres," he said.

The appointment also showed that Abdullah had heeded Tun Mahathir's suggestion on the choice of a deputy.

Muhammad Mustafa said the appointment of Special Adviser to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop indicated that Abdullah wanted him to be his co-pilot to navigate the country's economic and financial management boat.

The political scientist said Abdullah wanted Nor Mohamed to play the front role and no longer the "behind the scene" role as he had always been known for his major role in the country's economic and financial area.

"Nobody can question his appointment as he has a proven track record. He is a non-politician. The Prime Minister just wanted him to do the job," he said.

Muhammad Mustafa said Nor Mohamed's appointment could enhance foreign investor confidence in Malaysia.

As for Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin moving to the agriculture portfolio, the political scientist did not regard it as a demotion for Muhyiddin.

"In fact, the Prime Minister wanted a senior cabinet member to take charge of the sector which the premier had set as one of the important aspects of his agenda during his administration," he said.

This, he said, showed Abdullah's seriousness and priority in developing

the agricultural sector.

On Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Effendi Norwawi's move to the Prime Minister's Department in charge of Special Functions, Muhammad Mustafa believed it was only "a temporary measure" as Effendi might be sent to Sarawak in the coming general election.

The political scientist also said the people should not also view the posting of Second Finance Minister Datuk Dr Jamaludin Jarjis to the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs portfolio as a demotion.

"The appointment showed that Dr Jamaludin is now handling a ministry on his own and he is no longer a second minister. He is also taking care of a very important ministry," he said.

"The appointment of DPM and cabinet reshuffle is a signal from the Prime Minister that it is time to work, get the support of the younger generation and he is well prepared to face the general election with an optimistic mind," he said.

On the common belief that the appointment of Najib has completed the R-A-H-M-A-N theory, Muhammad Mustafa said it was just a coincidence.

Under the Rahman theory the country's Prime Ministers' names will have a word beginning with a letter from the word "Rahman" --- Tunku Abdul Rahman (R), Tun Abdul Razak (A), Tun Hussein Onn (H), Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (M), Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (A) and Najib (N).

-- BERNAMA

JM AHH AAM