

07 JAN 2004

Abdullah-Deputy

ABDULLAH STAMPS HIS MARK WITH CABINET APPOINTMENTS

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 7 (Bernama) -- Stamping his mark on the country's political landscape, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today named Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as deputy prime minister in a cabinet reshuffle which also saw the injection of new blood and switching of portfolios involving three ministers.

With the appointment, Abdullah, who succeeded Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31 last year, ended months of speculation over the country's No. 2 job and at the same time showed who was in charge.

The Prime Minister appointed his Special Advisor, Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop as Second Finance Minister and switched senior cabinet member, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin from the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to head the Agriculture Ministry.

He also reactivated the portfolio of Minister of Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department.

Nor Mohamed, a former central banker who helped orchestrate the pegging of the ringgit under Dr Mahathir's leadership will now assist Abdullah to look after the national coffers while Muhyiddin, once a contender to the DPM's post, has been handed the heavy responsibility of continuing the overhaul of the nation's agriculture sector.

Muhyiddin is succeeded by Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis who is formerly Second Finance Minister.

Datuk Dr Effendi Norwawi, who was Agriculture Minister, has been appointed Minister of Special Functions in the Prime Minister's Department.

All the appointments took effect immediately except that of Second Finance Minister as Nor Mohamed will assume duties on Friday.

Najib also retains his Defence portfolio.

In his immediate response to Najib's appointment, Dr Mahathir said: "I am happy for Najib."

The announcement at the Prime Minister's Office here was no

surprise as word about Najib's appointment had begun to swirl as early as yesterday afternoon when he was spotted entering the Prime Minister's Office.

All of today's newspapers frontpaged reports on the appointment of Najib as deputy prime minister, albeit quoting government sources.

Najib, who received his appointment letter from Abdullah yesterday, began the day in his new capacity when he accompanied the Prime Minister to the Istana Negara for an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail this morning.

Following that, Najib attended his first cabinet meeting of the year as Abdullah's deputy during which his cabinet colleagues pledged their full support to him.

His appointment marked the first time in the country's history that a father and son have held the country's number two post.

Tun Abdul Razak Hussein was named the deputy prime minister in September 1957, at the age of 35, and Najib, the ninth deputy prime minister at the age of 50.

Abdullah's choice for his deputy is well-received by Umno, the backbone of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition which will face the general election within the next 10 months.

"I think it will have a good impact. He's the number one vice president of Umno," Abdullah told a news conference when queried on what kind of impact Najib's appointment would have on the party of which he (Abdullah) is the acting president.

Abdullah, who is known for his down-to-earth attitude and an unsoiled reputation, since coming to power has announced several policies and initiatives which have gone down well with the people.

They include wiping out corruption, turning agriculture into a major sector of Malaysia's economic thrust, ensuring better public delivery system, overhauling the police force, improving the education system and prudent fiscal policies and management of public spending.

The appointment of another Umno heavyweight, Muhyiddin, as the new Agriculture Minister, showed Abdullah's trust in him in carrying out the tasks he had set out for the ministry to achieve.

The Prime Minister also promoted Jamaluddin to head the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry.

Jamaluddin, the Rompin-MP better known as "JJ", was chairman of the country's premier power supplier Tenaga Nasional before being appointed to the cabinet under Dr Mahathir's tenure.

Dr Effendi, who injected new ideas to the agriculture sector, was named Special Functions Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in the reshuffle.

On the job specifications of the Special Functions Minister, Abdullah said he would discuss this further with the Sarawak-born Dr Effendi.

The Prime Minister summed up the appointments with this reminder to his cabinet colleagues -- uphold the principle of team work and serve the people well.

-- BERNAMA

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