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Abdullah-Response

PM HEARTENED BY RAKYAT'S POSITIVE RESPONSE TO HIS ADMINISTRATION

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Approaching the 100-day mark of his administration, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today expressed satisfaction over the positive response from the majority of the rakyat on what he intends to do for them and the country.

The Prime Minister said he was aware of the high expectation of the rakyat arising from the various announcements and changes that he had so far instituted since taking over from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 31.

"There's a high expectation, yes I know that. But at the same time they have shown a readiness to support and welcome the changes that are being introduced," he said at a meeting with local media chiefs, here.

Abdullah, who is also Finance Minister, said he also managed to increase the level of confidence in the government which was doing things to improve services to the people.

The meeting, which lasted nearly two hours, saw Abdullah talking about a range of issues from efforts to stamp out corruption and trimming red tape to election and relations with Singapore.

Abdullah, whose term in office reaches 100 days next Saturday (Feb 7), said that his actions and moves had created a certain "feel good" vibes among the populace.

"This feel good (feeling) is what we have created. It came in many forms -- appointments, minor cabinet reshuffle, it came in the form of announcements of what we are going to do," he said.

The Prime Minister said that his plans for the country should not be seen as a populist approach to fish for votes.

Pledging to deliver on what he had promised to deliver, he said: "Those are real stuff. It constitutes my agenda of what I want to achieve."

Abdullah said what he had outlined so far for the country were not mere words for actions were in fact being taken to implement them.

When a few of those present hinted that the situation in the country felt right for an election to be held, Abdullah jokingly said: "I'm listening to a lot of advice now. Do you think now is the best time? I am watching the situation (as to) when will be the time we'll have the election. That's all I can say."

Asked what would normally disturb him, the Prime Minister said what worries him was that there seemed to be not enough time for him to do what he had to do.

Abdullah said he was now putting in longer time at work and would only be ready for bed later than usual.

"It takes a lot of work. Time is a problem. How to deal with this and that. Others, I am not worried. I am naturally not a person who worries.

"I can't be bothered spending my time worrying about this, worrying about that. I put complete faith in my Creator. If I am destined to do this job, He will help me. That's my belief," he said.

Turning to the issue of corruption which dominated a large part of today's session, Abdullah said it had not become a chronic problem but this was precisely why serious attempts must be made to keep it in check.

"The fact that it exists in many places, and the fact that we hear of people being caught for corruption, to me that is serious enough," he said.

Abdullah said the strategy to combat graft involved focusing on frontline agencies and departments which had to deal with the rakyat on a regular basis.

"This also involves those which issue permits and licences. This is what should be tackled quickly," he said.

The Prime Minister said counter services should also be improved for the benefit of the rakyat.

"I have asked ministers to go down (to the ground). You don't expect me to go on your behalf. I showed the way and you must do it too," said Abdullah who caught everybody off guard when he made a spot check at the Immigration Department in Pusat Bandar Damansara earlier on the job.

He stressed on the need to shorten administrative procedures.

"All this is to reduce delay and make things easier. This delay is what

is causing the problem. Delay breeds corruption because people are impatient, people want to jump the queue and are prepared to give money," he said.

Turning to Malaysia's relations with Singapore, the Prime Minister said the approach now was to try and resolve the easier bilateral problems and continue addressing the more difficult ones.

"Let's deal with the easy ones first so that the rakyat will know that the issues are not piling up unresolved," he said.

Noting that he had no problem working with Singaporeans, Abdullah said:

"To me, being nice to people isn't a bad thing. To me it's not a question you want to be tough, you want to be soft.

"The issue of toughness and softness is not involved here. (It is rather) an issue of creating an atmosphere where you can sit down together and talk and sort it out.

"I think the mood is good. They are ready to talk, we are also ready to talk. Let's get things organised," he said.

Queried on his plans for the young people in the country, Abdullah said he greatly believed that someone who invested in young people was making the right investment.

"They are our future, they are our assets and we must therefore utilise that asset in the best way possible. They have to be motivated, they have to be given first and foremost good education. Character-building for them is very important too," he said.

Stressing that he was not against old people, Abdullah said: "I want to give the young people an opportunity because time is passing very fast. The time will come before they realise that at a young age, they have to shoulder a lot of responsibilities."

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