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100 per cent in days

Zoe Phoon

CAPTAINS of industry were pleasantly surprised when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi held a dialogue with them recently. It turned out to be a good exchange of views. More importantly, it showed the new Prime Minister's willingness to hear businessmen out and assure them of his support.

Malaysian Business decided to seek the views of a few local businessmen on what they thought of the Prime Minister's first 100 days in office. We sought their views on Abdullah's economic agenda, his leadership so far and their wish list for his administration.

TAN SRI AZMAN HASHIM,

Group Chairman, AmBank Group

His re-prioritising of mega projects will help improve the financial and cash flow management of the government. Also on his agenda is the promotion of agriculture, SMEs, etc, which will benefit the larger section of the population. Malaysia has the fundamentals, infrastructure and resources to meet the new challenges and we can see that he is making full use of the expertise available to him, both from the public and private sectors.

His willingness to hold dialogues with all parties is also indicative of this. He has also continued the business-friendly approach of the government and is warming up to international relations. We hope that he will be successful in his efforts to weed out corruption, speed up the judiciary process including the syariah courts (both of which are now taking too long a time to deal with backlogged cases), and to have a more efficient and transparent civil service.

DATUK ALAN TONG KOK MAU,

Group Executive Chairman, Bukit Kiara Properties Sdn Bhd

I am very impressed with our Prime Minister's emphasis on education, security, integrity and efficiency for both the public and private sectors. He has introduced several policies within a short span of time after he took over the helm. The policies touch on the delivery system and transparency, which is the pillar of integrity. Such measures would eventually reflect the course which Corporate Malaysia would take. Integrity and efficiency attract confidence and trust which are what businesses thrive on. As such, the measures, if executed consistently, will yield positive results in the long run.

From the point of view of the construction and building industry, the private sector, together with the public sector, needs to look at the time required for the delivery system of housing and building completion in general. In the past, it was not uncommon to experience the time required from the day the land is purchased, subdivided, constructed and completed, taking four to seven years. If the delivery system can be shortened by 40%, the benefit to the economy could be tremendous.

The speedy cash flow turnover could generate a lot more business and would even reduce prices through cost savings resulting from short holding costs, efficiency and productivity. Not to mention the competitive environment created. Such dynamism would attract the attention of foreign investors.

DATUK P KASI,

Executive Director,

MK Land Holdings Bhd

What appeals to me is Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's vision that the country needs to focus on human 'software' to match the infrastructure 'hardware' that we have built. His emphasis on a strong 'National Performance Culture' concerning the public sector, corporate sector and human resources is also commendable. Also laudable is the effort to lower the cost of doing business in Malaysia by addressing public sector inefficiency, red tape reduction, service improvement and lack of information.

The key issue now is delivery. He needs the commitment and cooperation from all parties. The emergence of China drawing away a lot of manufacturing industries and FDI, coupled with the weakening US dollar, has also posed new challenges to Malaysia. A strategic plan for the future for sustainable growth of the country is necessary to address the continuing changes in the world, with particular emphasis on strengthening the Malaysian economy. The Multimedia Super Corridor, knowledge-based industries and information and communications technology could provide future growth, but they have not been fast enough to contribute significantly to our economy to replace our losses in the manufacturing sector to countries like China to match the changes.

Issues of overcapacity in various sectors would have to be addressed to sustain economic growth for the future. We should, after due consultation with the people in the industry, produce a Property, Construction and Housing Master Plan for the country and a Tourism Industry Master Plan for the nation.

We have the opportunities and facilities, what we lack is integrated thinking, proper coordination, proper packaging and marketing to the right people and the right countries. I am not saying we have not done well already, what I am saying is we can do even much better to help the economy and country.

DATUK MUSTAFA MANSUR,  
President, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM)

The Prime Minister's commitment towards further improving the efficiency of the government's delivery system and strong stand against corruption as soon as he took over the helm of the country has certainly helped to reinforce investor and business confidence in the country. We are also pleased to note that he has taken bold measures to bring in more technocrats to further strengthen the government. The business sector hopes to see greater improvements in the level of service, particularly at the state and local authority levels as well as in key government agencies, which are in constant contact with the business community. An overall improvement in efficiency in public service delivery would help to remove unnecessary costs to business operations and processes and help to enhance business competitiveness.

The smooth change in leadership, which continues to uphold the business-friendly policies and approach, forged by our former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, speaks well of the maturity and stability of the government. The continuance of business-friendly policies is especially important at a time when the Malaysian manufacturing sector is pushing hard to move into a higher level of industrialisation of greater value-added and knowledge-driven processes.

The manufacturing sector hopes Abdullah's leadership would continue to strengthen the consultative process and forge a closer partnership with industry so that the entire country can become more dynamic and would be able to respond quickly to the challenges of globalisation.

DATUK GURDIAL SINGH GILL,  
Founder and Chairman,

GS Gill Sdn Bhd

I am really very pleased to see that the Prime Minister is visiting other countries and strengthening Malaysia's friendship with them. We can go forward, particularly with Singapore with whom we have been having problems, and I am confident all these will be settled amicably.

I have personally known Abdullah for almost 15 years and from what I know he is a very straightforward and honest person. We Malaysians are very proud of him. You can see that within a short period, he has already gone around the country and almost all Asian countries would like to work with him.

As Prime Minister, his leadership would definitely steer Corporate Malaysia through new challenges. This alone would put Malaysia forward. We wish our Prime Minister's administration goes forward. As for my wish list, I would like to bring this up; we have people living in Malaysia who have been staying here for almost 13 years and have not left the country and have their passports duly extended. They have applied for permanent residency since they have stayed here for such a long time. They are parents of children born in Malaysia. They should be given permanent resident status without any further delay.

TAN KEE CHUNG,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
OpenSys (M) Bhd

His idea of balancing the budget and letting the private sector drive the economy forward is very positive. While there are merits in the Keynesian methodology, there is only so much the government can do for the rakyat. We should ask what we can do for the country as opposed to what the country (government) can do for us.

His comment about 'first world infrastructure but third world mentality' is also very appropriate because to compete successfully with other advanced countries, we need to cultivate soft factors such as caring for the environment and encouraging constructive criticism to better oneself. I think the Prime Minister's leadership style has been extremely positive and refreshing so far. One does not have to shout to be heard and he is doing that admirably well. I believe he will get some things done that seemed impossible before.

While some of his ideas are what the business community has been waiting to hear for a long time, there will always be gaps between vision and execution. If Abdullah can carry out 20% of what he has set out to do, we would certainly be much better off than before.

TAN SRI LIM KOK WING,  
President, Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology

The Cabinet's decision to postpone the double-tracking rail project was a bold step. It was not expected, but the decision was praised by investors as necessary and prudent to control the Government's budgetary deficit. The business community was also happy that the Prime Minister ended months of speculation by appointing Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as Deputy Prime Minister. The choice was expected and welcomed. Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop's appointment as Second Finance Minister was a pleasant surprise. The stock market reacted very well to both appointments. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also showed his determination to upgrade agriculture by assigning the task to Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, a senior political leader and a very experienced administrator.

The policy initiatives introduced by the Prime Minister and his actions and words have created confidence in his Government. Public support for him and his Government is strong and growing. One indication is the big turnout of people at public events he attends, sometimes in the rain. Another was during Christmas when his message of greeting to Christians

read in some churches was loudly applauded.

The Government must continue to adopt a global outlook. Globalisation is inevitable, bringing with it oceans of changes that we have yet to fully comprehend. Thus, looking outwards, seizing a role in the international stage and taking an active part in the decisions that will usher in the changes are vitally important to the future growth and prosperity of Malaysia.

I am heartened by the Prime Minister's recent reminder to companies not to be content with being mere adopters and users of technology, but trying to increasingly strive to be adapters and creators of technology. Survival and success will increasingly depend on our capability to add value at a higher and higher rung of the value chain.

In the larger international arena, I hope to see the Prime Minister take full advantage of the existing goodwill and respect that Malaysia enjoys to build global consensus and craft a multilateral effort to push for world peace. That effort should start with the Palestinian struggle to regain their homeland.

In such a quest, I am confident he will have the full support of the majority of Malaysians and all peace-loving people around the world.

TENGGU DATUK ZAINAL RASHID

President,

Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI)

In his statements and actions to date, he has set out to redefine the Malaysian image and how it is perceived globally. While retaining the valuable economic initiatives and policies he has inherited, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has set out to carry forward these policies in an improved atmosphere of openness, quality and transparency.

From a private sector perspective, this is a very encouraging development. Malaysian business policies are already known for their business-friendly aspects, but with increasing attention being given internationally to the ethics and value systems that businesses embody. It is of significant value to create an enhanced image of responsibility and good governance in presenting Malaysia to the rest of the world.

To date, the new Prime Minister has demonstrated a high level of leadership in setting out his objectives for the Malaysian Government. Ultimately, however, the leader's vision must be translated into action and the challenge will be to secure the cooperation of all levels of public and private sectors to adopt the vision and implement it. Only time will determine the success that Abdullah will have with this, but a good start has been made in setting out clear and unambiguous parameters.

Malaysia has a fine track record of growth and development under previous leaders, but to meet the challenges of the new competitive world environment and sustain that growth, new or enhanced initiatives are necessary and perhaps the will to take calculated risks at both economic and social levels to achieve the best results.

Possible areas for consideration that might be evaluated could include continued emphasis on a stable and attractive monetary policy and fiscal regime. More and more incentives are being offered globally and Malaysia cannot afford to lag behind.

The process of liberalisation in manufacturing and services should continue and increase in all business sectors. Encouraging new businesses with new processes and systems to establish themselves in Malaysia brings not merely investment and jobs but new technology, which will raise the overall knowledge and skill level nationally and can then act as a catalyst for further research and development within Malaysia.

A new breed of thinking, independent, adaptable workers is needed for the future success of the nation and MICCI would welcome signs of a new

educational thrust throughout the education system (at school, college, university and training institution levels) to generate the right type of workers to meet the needs of the new era and new industries. To complement the ongoing development of new skilled Malaysians, the chamber suggests that it be made easier for skills also to be imported and secured within Malaysia for developmental purposes through easing restrictions on residency and employment for those who are committed to add their talents to the Malaysian knowledge landscape.

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