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Dr M, Abdullah top list of most liked world leaders

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Who are the international leaders whom Malaysians like?

Not surprisingly, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi top the list.

The surprise is that they are joined by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and American President George W. Bush.

Also on the like-list are Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former South African leader Nelson Mandela.

This was revealed in four surveys by the International Islamic University's Research Centre since July last year.

The surveys, involving between 595 and 2,098 randomly selected respondents nationwide, were also conducted in October last year and in January and April this year.

"We basically asked respondents to name, off the top of their heads, which international leader they liked most," said IIU Research Centre dean Datuk Prof Dr Syed Arabi Idid, who co-ordinated the polling.

According to him, Indian respondents formed the majority of those who selected Dr Mahathir and Abdullah.

A large number of women favoured Dr Mahathir, while Abdullah was chosen by the majority of male respondents.

"They could have named whoever they wanted, so it was a surprise how most identified Dr Mahathir and Pak Lah as their favourites. It shows that Malaysians regard our previous and current Prime Ministers as international leaders."

Dr Mahathir was the top choice among respondents in each of the four times the survey was conducted. He scored highest in the second poll in October last year, just prior to his retirement later that month.

Abdullah, meanwhile, became a significant choice during the third survey which was done in January this year, two months after he became Prime Minister.

The percentage of respondents who chose Abdullah has since increased, from eight per cent in January to 18 per cent in April.

Syed Arabi said one reason why Abdullah's popularity jumped was due to the growing confidence in his leadership, especially after the Barisan Nasional's victory in the March general election.

He added that many developments have taken place since April, "so I would like to do another survey to find whether the same trend has prevailed or whether it has changed."

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