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Abdullah's bold initiatives

Din Merican

PRIME Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took office on Oct 31. In a matter of three months, he has introduced new initiatives on both the domestic and international fronts.

In so doing, he has invigorated our country, and created expectations of a promising future built on the successes of the previous administration.

This situation is not unlike 1981 when his predecessor, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, took office - a nation is again charged up, and excited about possibilities.

The Prime Minister's initiatives to fight corruption, improve public service delivery, promote transparency and greater accountability in both the public and private sectors, uphold the rule of law, and focus on agriculture and rural development are bold.

In general, they are very well received but they do require the co-operation and the wholehearted support of Malaysians on a sustained basis if we are to see real change.

On the international front, he has set a new tone, which will enable us to lower our voices without losing our effectiveness in getting our message across to the rest of the world. In order to get his message across he travelled extensively throughout the length and breadth of the country, and in recent days engaged in shuttle diplomacy by visiting our Asean neighbours to engage their leaders in an exchange of ideas and fresh perspectives.

His olive branch to Singapore, for example, has re-opened the channels of communications so that our relations with the island republic can be less stormy than in the past. We must now wait to see whether the response from the "other side" of the Causeway is forthcoming beyond words and pleasantries.

It must be beyond golf on Sentosa Island, and yee sang diplomacy in Johor Baru.

The pace he has set for himself is punishing, one that would exhaust even a 35-year-old. Fancy travelling to Vietnam and Cambodia in one day, then chairing important meetings including a Cabinet meeting the next morning, followed by a host of social functions in the evening.

I hope with the appointment of Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak as Deputy Prime Minister, our Prime Minister can share the burden of running this country. This will no doubt give him the time to think and reflect on matters of state and get some well-deserved rest.

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