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Pak Lah switched to Islamic studies after failing statistics

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today revealed that he had wanted to major in economics in university, but had to switch to Islamic studies after failing a paper on statistics.

"I was not allowed to continue to do all my honours course in economics and I had to choose other subjects for which I was qualified. So I decided to choose Islamic studies," Abdullah said.

He did so in mind of his grandfather, who had wanted him to go to Mecca for religious studies, but "my father wanted me to continue my English education. My grandfather gave in. So I went to English school, and I had to forget about going to Mecca for my religious education".

"When I had to decide whether to do an honours degree course in Islamic studies or Malay studies, I thought Islamic studies would be good," he said.

Abdullah, interviewed by CNN's Lorraine Hahn on the TalkAsia programme, also spoke about his mother, with whom he was very close.

He said she had had a great influence on his attitude towards life, religion and his family and human relations. Asked how he coped when his wife had to go for cancer treatment, he said: "Well I had to cope with it somehow.

"We maintained contact when she was in the United States. We talked to each other on the phone almost every night. And there was an one occasion when I tried video conferencing, but it did not come out very well and we decided to talk on the phone.

"When I had the time, I would fly there to see her but I couldn't do that except for one occasion. She returned to Malaysia and went back. She is still going through a very difficult time but she is so disciplined, sticking to her regime of treatment. Sometimes I feel so sad that there is nothing I can do, but we pray a lot together. I think that is a source of comfort," he added.

In reply to a question on whether he was tight with money, something both his mother and wife had said about him in the past, Abdullah agreed he was careful with his expenditure.

"My family was not rich. We had very little to live on. I remember crying because I wanted a new toy and my father couldn't afford it. He didn't say he didn't have the money, but he persuaded me not to have it.

"But today when I look back, I think he didn't have the money to buy the toy."

Asked how he felt when he was dropped from former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir's Cabinet in 1987, Abdullah described the three years and nine months he spent in the political wilderness as the "Japanese Occupation" of his life.

He said some of those whom he considered friends not only refused to talk to him, but would refuse even to be seen with him.

"They would see me at a distance and just go somewhere else."

Abdullah said he retained some support in Umno, however, as being a vice-president, he always maintained contact with the grassroots.

Abdullah admitted that Dr Mahathir was a hard act to follow, but reiterated that he was not under his predecessor's shadow.

"No, (Dr Mahathir) would not interfere with whatever I do, he would not comment on whatever I do. He said, 'This is your Government, you do whatever you want, you are the Prime Minister'."

On his philosophy in life, Abdullah said it was best to seek balance.
"There must be a balance in everything we do, not too much of
everything, keep it simple, not complicated," he said.

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