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Three months on, momentum builds

THREE months is not a long time, but the time Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has been Prime Minister seems to have flown by in the blink of an eye. It is already possible to look back and see how wrong some of his detractors were before he became PM, when they aired their proforma reservations over his "drive", or "energy", or "vision", etc. Three months on, consider what he's done.

He has begun tackling public-sector corruption on two fronts: by shaking up enforcement agencies with the reminder that no one is above the law, and by sprucing up the "public delivery system" by insisting that the interface between Government and the people operates efficiently and honestly, with a sincere zeal for transparency and sound corporate governance.

He has activated youth, recognising that insofar as "they are the future", the future is here and now. This has been a most heartening recognition of the sacrifices the older generation have made in respect of the youth of today. It is not over-optimistic to expect that youth will rally around this challenge as never before. We will watch the progress of the Vision Schools and National Service as barometers of their empowerment, even as their immediate elders are called on to assume the reins of the nation's management and operations.

On the foreign front, Abdullah's recent whirlwind introductory tour of Asean was remarkable for the refurbishment of Malaysia's bilateral relations in the region. In the particular case of Singapore, what had once seemed stalemated is moving again at a pace and in a direction both countries find more workable.

Abdullah's initiation into top office is also to be noted for what he has not done. He has not flagged, despite a working schedule that has alarmed those concerned for his physical well-being. He has not proven hesitant or uncertain in decision-making. He has robustly rebutted notions that he would be a "caretaker" PM, muddling along on the momentum of his predecessor. The best of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's many legacies remains. But Abdullah has already stamped his own identity on national governance, and the Government and nation are, so far, the better for it.