

09/02/2003

A leadership change, not a regime change

Munir Majid

Not Just People

A LEADERSHIP change will also bring about changes other than change in personnel. Partly, these changes would be the result of new people coming in. However, the greater tone will be set by the new leader himself.

In the case of Abdullah, the received wisdom is that there will be no change in major policies, only a change in style.

While this may be true, a change in people and style has got substantial consequences.

Those who might think it would be business as usual, as it were, could be in for a surprise.

In building upon Dr Mahathir's achievements, Abdullah is likely to want to protect them through vigorous management and accountability.

He might want to emphasise substance and less visibility. He might want statements to be properly weighed and considered, rather than the shoot-from-the-hip type like the flurry of statements about willingness to resign, what is accepted practice in the Cabinet and Government, all of which sometimes only reflect a lack of depth and knowledge which one should not want to exhibit in public.

The profile of Government might look different, at least as it is publicly expressed.

In an age of great uncertainty, the concept of Malaysia Inc bequeathed by Dr Mahathir, which has done so much to move the Malaysian economic ship forward, is likely to be concentrated to steering and managing it in stormy waters, where they have to be greater calculation and closer management.

There will be greater challenges on managing risk and, therefore, a greater emphasis on paying attention to detail. While the big policies on socio-economic management, moderation and racial integration, multicultural education, ICT development are to continue, the so-called new leadership style will begin to make a considerable difference on how the country is governed. While these changes will not add up to a regime change, they would be in excess of a mere change in leadership style and emphasis.