

22/06/2003

Outstanding statesman, a toast of the Malay race and country

IN a tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi described the Umno president as nakhoda yang arif (a wise captain) who ably navigated the ship to safer ground.

Abdullah said this had placed Umno in a strong position, with the people and country gaining respect.

Islam was given a progressive and dynamic dimension, bringing with it true teachings that emphasised fundamentals through realistic approaches.

"He has never given up, bowed to threats nor submitted to pressure.

"He is a symbol of diligence, a portrait of an outstanding statesman, bright and brilliant."

In his winding-up speech at the end of the general assembly, he said the country and Malays were grateful to have been blessed with a leader of such qualities.

Dr Mahathir, said Abdullah, is the toast of the Malay race and the country.

"As a show of the country's and people's appreciation for his contributions and excellent service, we have accepted the proposal raised at this assembly to set up Institut Pemikiran Mahathir (Institute of Mahathir's Thoughts).

Abdullah also paid tribute to Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali who had made a lot of sacrifices by sharing her husband with the country and the people.

To their children, Abdullah thanked them for their readiness to "loan" their father.

"We are aware of the amount of Dr Mahathir's time and energy that had been given to us. Dr Siti Hasmah is a role model of a woman, wife and mother.

"Dr Siti Hasmah has been his prime motivator and source of strength since they first met at the Medical College of Universiti Malaya in Singapore."

Abdullah said he and his wife, Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, were grateful to Dr Siti Hasmah for her assistance and guidance.

He said he and Dr Mahathir had shared a lot of experience together.

"I am thankful to him for his trust in letting me join his Cabinet when he formed it in 1981.

"Twenty-two years had gone by and today, among Umno Ministers, (Datuk Seri) Rafidah (Aziz) and I are the only remaining members of that Cabinet, although I was on a three-year-and-10-month `sabbatical leave'. But that was a blessing in disguise."

Abdullah said their friendship was much longer, if his service in the Government was taken into account.

"I have known him when he was the chairman of the Higher Education Council, the Education Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister.

"Throughout that period, we have gone through a lot of things together. During his tenure as party president, there have been times when action by party leaders and members had hurt his feelings.

"On behalf of the ordinary members and supreme council members, Endon and myself, I apologise to Dr Mahathir and to Dr Siti Hasmah for whatever we have done that might have hurt their feelings.

"Dr Mahathir had apologised to us when opening the assembly on Thursday.

"Actually, we should extend our apology to him first," he said.

Abdullah said the party president had given him confidence but what touched him most was Dr Mahathir's autograph on his policy speech booklet in the form of a prayer that reads: "May Allah bless you when you take over."

Abdullah said he selected "managing success" as the theme of his speech at the joint opening of the Youth, Wanita and Puteri assemblies to demonstrate his appreciation and respect for the success that Dr Mahathir had brought about and which would be passed down to the party, the Malays, the people and the nation.

"We inherit from Dr Mahathir a successful Umno and Barisan Nasional.

"To me, these successes have to be managed properly and with trust so that they will serve as a strong foundation and a launching pad to scale greater heights."

Abdullah said he was happy that Dr Mahathir had given his assurance he would continue to assist Umno in its struggle by offering ideas, when he is no longer in power.

He said Dr Mahathir had told him: "Lah, you just tell me, I will be there to help you."