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Backbenchers give Abdullah vote of confidence

DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday received the highest accolades from the backbenchers.

Making his first official appearance in Parliament as the country's fifth Prime Minister, Abdullah, who was sitting next to the seat labelled "kosong", the one that he vacated since his appointment three days ago, appeared visibly moved as he listened to the show of absolute confidence in his leadership capabilities.

Speaker Datuk Lim Si Cheng, prior to allowing the debate on the motion to support Abdullah's appointment as Prime Minister, had set a limit to the number of MPs participating in the session.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (BN-Gua Musang), in expressing confidence in Abdullah's administration, said all sectors of the society, including the political fraternity, must push for the establishment of a strong "Bangsa Malaysia" under the new era of leadership.

Calling on the Government to better prepare the people for the Asean Free Trade Area and World Trade Organisation, he said the various sectors in the economy had to increase their competitiveness to withstand the intense challenges of the near future.

Razaleigh, whose speech was later dubbed "berapi" (fiery) by Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed (BN-Shah Alam) who tabled the motion of support, also urged for transparency in government dealings, especially in the awarding of tenders.

"This new governance under Abdullah must ensure any malpractices in the administration, especially corruption, are eliminated.

"Transparency is the basis of the governing system we have adopted since independence. Its sanctity must be preserved and the people's money and rights observed," he said, adding all efforts must also be put into ensuring the judiciary system was free of any political influence.

Other backbenchers in the debate included Mah Siew Keong (BN-Telok Intan), Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar) and Datuk Dr Maximus Johnity Ongkili (BN-Bandau)

Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) called on Abdullah to set up a Malaysian Leadership Foundation to study the thoughts and leadership styles of former prime ministers.

Ruhanie, who said this while debating Abdullah's motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir, said the country's four prime ministers - Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad - had left legacies which should be studied.