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Help Pak Lah take Malaysia to greater heights

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi urged Malaysians to "work with me, not for me to achieve excellence, glory and distinction" and to take Malaysia to greater heights.

In his inaugural address at the Dewan Rakyat, Abdullah said: "The responsibility is heavy and I cannot do it alone." He said he would need the support and co-operation of all segments of society and urged his Cabinet colleagues, legislators, administrators, the private sector, political parties, the media and Malaysian citizens from all walks of life to ensure that we succeed.

Even though he has inherited the responsibility of governing a successful country, the challenge to manage and build upon the success and to take the country to greater heights cannot be underestimated.

Malaysia today is an example of political stability, economic prosperity, racial unity and religious tolerance and acknowledged as a progressive Islamic country. Malaysians must build on this, on all fronts.

The new Prime Minister pledged to "carry out my duties with integrity, trustworthiness, efficiency and fairness" and build on the foundation laid by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad who had "brought the country to the altar of excellence and allowed us to emerge as a nation that is respected throughout the world".

Abdullah wants to do the "right thing" according to the religious and moral dictates.

In carrying out his duties and responsibilities, he is submitting himself to the ultimate test - with the highest authority, God, to judge him. The failure of this test, he told Members of Parliament, "will be a heavy burden for me to bear in this world and the next."

Even as he turns to God for "guidance and inspiration, strength and fortitude, patience and determination" Malaysians should rally round to help him carry out his duties.

Pak Lah's responsibilities are manifold - he has the additional responsibilities of the Finance and Home Ministries.

He has been quick in coming to the aid of the unfortunate and especially those affected by the floods in Kedah and Penang. He has also been fast and firm in deciding on Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Omar as the new Inspector General of Police.

Abdullah, "Mr Nice", is increasingly being described as "firm". The qualities of "nice and firm" are not at odds. And even as Pak Lah continues to reach out to the people, it does not mean he should be taken for granted.

He chose Parliament, "an institution of public trust, an institution based on consultation, an institution where laws are made and where policies are debated" and the ultimate arbiter of democracy to make his first official speech.

He spoke of the need to develop a value system, which nourishes the young and honours the old and one that rejects crass materialism. He also spoke of rural development that must continue to be part of mainstream national economic development, meritocracy within the Bumiputera community, democracy, governance, corruption, transparency, crime prevention, people-friendliness, the institution of the family, Asian values, the role of women and globalisation.

While he wants the people to work with him, he also places great

importance on the need to safeguard and not misplace people's trust. And he wants the administration at the district and local levels to be reengineered to improve services.

The Government should not only be a regulator but an enabler to raise the "effectiveness of preventive measures in order to combat, prevent and reduce corruption". He is mindful of the fact that it is the people's trust and people's money that he has to safeguard as Prime Minister and Finance Minister.

Dealing with change is not always easy. But we do not have a choice. With increased global competition and new challenges, Malaysians must move forward.

As the Prime Minister said, we need to identify new sources of economic growth, develop new approaches to enhance competitiveness and strengthen resilience.

Rural development, modern agriculture, information and communications technology, biotechnology and science will need greater attention. The public and private sectors must continue to work in tandem to propel the country forward and upward. No cog in the wheel can remain idle for the nation to progress and attain higher levels of excellence.

Delays and shoddy work not only add to the cost but also delay progress and development. The need to be "clean, efficient and trustworthy" should not be limited to just the public sector but those in the private sector.

The international arena is no less challenging. Malaysia has attained a reputation for its outspoken views, unorthodox policies and as a champion and spokesman of the poor and developing countries. It is currently the chairman of the 114-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and with a platform to have its views heard.

Undoubtedly, with Abdullah there will be "a new style, new tone" on the international scene which, according to Ernie Bower, president of the USAsean Business Council, "will both sustain the excellent linkages that existed previously and create space for new and creative areas of cooperation". This, Bower says, "could certainly mean good things for our trade and investment relations".

Abdullah is no stranger on the international stage having served as Foreign Minister for eight years. The goodwill that he sowed and the friendships that he forged will be useful in his current post and for the task that he has ahead of him.

We owe it to him and to ourselves to work with the Prime Minister to help him do the right thing and take Malaysia to a higher level.