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Need to separate wheat from chaff to serve effectively, cleanly

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ROTI canai with condensed milk may not be your everyday breakfast fare. In fact, not many people eat it that way.

But if your name is Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, with the Datuk Seri prefix, then roti canai with condensed milk is neither new nor strange.

It seems that the dish was a favourite when the country's new Prime Minister was a boy in his hometown of Kepala Batas.

Mustapha, the owner of the Langkawi Lagoon resort on the legendary islands, and I found this out last month. While we were enjoying a breakfast of nasi lemak and coffee in the dining room of the resort's seavilla, Pak Lah asked if they served roti canai.

Mus ordered fresh ones and Pak Lah said he wanted to eat them served with condensed milk!

It tasted good, especially as the roti canai was crispy. Pak Lah ordered one more roti canai and this was shared between the three of us. That was all that's needed to start Pak Lah on a nostalgic roti canai susu trip.

I don't think this will be a regular on his menu for Pak Lah now. His menu is now more national in nature, and will include international dishes as he takes the country to another level of development.

The new Prime Minister has many items on his agenda, and Umno matters will be one of those which he has to give special attention to.

His most urgent task would be to finalise the list of names to head the Umno divisions following the increase in the divisional number after the re-delineation exercise by the Election Commission.

Once he gets this out of the way, then he can start looking into his crystal ball for a date to hold the general election.

Pak Lah is aware of the intense lobbying going around as leaders jostle and try to position themselves in anticipation of the general election.

In Umno, the talk is very much on whether the incumbents would get back their positions. Some would probably think that their days are numbered because they were there during the days when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was party president and Prime Minister.

Only Pak Lah knows whether they will remain or move on. But if they have done genuine work, and if they possess strong grassroots support with proven track record, then they have no reason to worry.

Abdullah is a man who is able to evaluate the effectiveness of these people from within and without. He has sufficient exposure and knowledge to see who is genuine and who is not. His three-year "sabbatical" from the party would have stood him in good stead, I'm sure.

We should give Pak Lah a breather in the next couple of weeks. The man has been working his heart out. Ramadan is a good time to pause and do some clear thinking and catch up with serious spiritual pursuits.

Work is already there, but a short break (read a few rest days) would do him a world of good. But knowing him, rest would probably be in the form of going through files and meetings.

Everyone is also eager to know who he is going to name as his deputy. While the nation awaits with bated breath, the candidates themselves, too, may have sleepless nights.

Let's not burden Pak Lah with too many questions on this matter because he will announce his choice sooner or later.

Regardless of his choice, Pak Lah is sure to get the support of the people who are eager to see an effective team at work.

Pak Lah must have derived much satisfaction from the huge crowd which greeted him at Penang airport. I don't recall any other occasion when the airport was filled to the brim with people with one unity of purpose - to welcome and show their appreciation to an unassuming person who has gone through the mill in his political learning curve.

Abdullah, too, realised this and made known to all and sundry that he is where he is today because of the support he has received from friends and supporters.

However, Pak Lah has to separate the wheat from the chaff so he can serve the way he wants - effectively and cleanly.

I hope many people will not make the mistake of taking Pak Lah for granted because of his friendly and obliging nature. They do this at their peril.

Many seem to have forgotten that this man has served three Prime Ministers before becoming one - Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Dr Mahathir.

Remember, he was a key figure in the National Operations Council formed just after the May 13 riots and his experience in dealing with such a difficult situation will serve him well.

Each leader will want to stamp his mark on the party and country he leads. Pak Lah has many people who have pledged their support to him. I hope they are not just empty pledges.

As for Tun Dr Mahathir who has gone overseas for a much-deserved holiday, he should go with his mind at ease. He should just enjoy the time with his wife and family.

He has handed over a Government that is strong and able; left Pak Lah a party that is buoyed by a strong sense of unity and eager to carry on the struggle.

We had just witnessed a most open, peaceful and transparent transfer of power in the country.

It's not really strange because the party and national leadership are helmed by men who know what they are doing for the King and country.

It's all yours now, Pak Lah.