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#### Opposition congratulates Pak Lah

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Sujatani Poosparajah; Deborah Loh; PAS and the DAP yesterday congratulated Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on his taking over as Prime Minister from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Datuk Dr Hassan Ali (Pas-Parit Buntar), who is also a party vice-president, said Abdullah was known for his strong religious background and strong stand against corruption.

Debating the motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir, he described Abdullah as a pious man.

Hassan said Abdullah had shed "the tears of a God-fearing, pious and humane person" when his composure broke briefly as he moved the motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir.

Abdullah was reading the last sentence of his speech on the motion of thanks when his voiced cracked as he tried to hold back tears.

"The members of the Opposition and of Pas wish to congratulate the Kepala Batas MP, who has just taken hold of the reins of the country's top post," Hassan said congratulating Abdullah and wishing Dr Mahathir a happy retirement.

"Let us also pray that Abdullah will be able to take the country from strength to strength," he said.

Hassan also had praise for Dr Mahathir's leadership, describing him as "a great human being."

"Dr Mahathir has set the vision and mission for the country. As a goal-setter, he is beyond compare. He is an intelligent planner and executor.

"His dedication is an example to the people. Even in his last days as Prime Minister, he was working from morning till night.

"We cannot dispute his ability and his dedication which should be followed by all Malaysians."

Hassan added that Dr Mahathir had the "amazing ability" to apply knowledge in various fields for the country's development.

"Economics, information communication technology, science, international relations - he mastered all these fields even though he was trained as a doctor."

Hassan's praises did not last long, however, as he turned his speech into a diatribe against Dr Mahathir's views of Islam, which he claimed were secular and a threat to the religion.

He stoked the anger of Barisan MPs in the House who began booing him for raising issues like corruption in Government, crimes in society, and the trial and imprisonment of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Hassan was the only Pas member who debated the motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir.

Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang (Pas-Marang) was not in the House.

There were lighter moments earlier, generated by Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) when he debated the motion of thanks.

"Last year, Dr Mahathir invited me to have coffee with him. But we never did because as Prime Minister there were so many people who wanted to see him. So he still owes me a cup of coffee," said Tan, drawing laughter from the House.

Tan said although he had differences with Dr Mahathir, he acknowledged that the country was thankful to the former prime minister who had brought development and international recognition to Malaysia.

"Dr Mahathir has charted a unique path for Malaysia...He is also outspoken and charismatic."

Tan welcomed Abdullah to the post and cautioned him about challenges he would face, mentioning specifically money politics and implementing meritocracy when selecting people for posts.

"A prime minister is often taken advantage of by other people with their own agenda. But a prime minister should evaluate a person's ability and appoint or promote them based on meritocracy."

He urged Abdullah to set an example through his leadership, saying, "the Prime Minister is captain of the ship and his officials and Cabinet members are his crew. If the captain is trustworthy, his crew will follow him and his passengers will be safe."

Kerk Kim Hock (DAP-Kota Melaka) said while Abdullah had the qualities and qualifications to be the nation's chief executive, the Prime Minister should ensure policy changes that kept pace with the needs and challenges of the day.

He urged Abdullah to focus on national unity and peace.