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Pak Lah: Don't question PM's achievements

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that nobody, including the Western media, can dismiss Malaysia's achievements under the leadership of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The acting Prime Minister said this in response to an article in the April 5 issue of The Economist on the change of leadership in Malaysia.

At a Press conference earlier, Umno vice-president and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak echoed Abdullah's sentiments that the article was unnecessarily critical of the policies and programmes implemented by Dr Mahathir.

Najib also said the publication was unfair in its assessment of Abdullah.

The 16-page article with the heading "The Changing of the Guard: A Survey of Malaysia" among others touched on race relations, the Internal Security Act, the transition of power in October, the threat from Pas, hudud and the Alternative Front, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the National Economic Policy and the country's economic policies and the Asian economic crisis.

Abdullah, in his statement, said that under Dr Mahathir, Malaysia had become prosperous, progressive, harmonious and respected.

He said the article gave a negative picture of the country's development and progress, adding that it was obvious from the article, that the writer and magazine appeared to harbour ill will against the country's leadership.

According to the acting Prime Minister, the article must not be wrongly interpreted or exploited by any party.

Najib said the article had also made comparison between Dr Mahathir and Abdullah which could create misunderstandings.

According to the article, written by Christopher Lockwood, Abdullah is said to be everything that Dr Mahathir was not, a cautious bureaucrat rather than a visionary, a conciliator, not a fighter, an unworldly descendant of clerical scholars with a degree in Islamic studies rather than a technophile and moderniser.

It labelled Abdullah as less vigorous and questioned his ability to "guard Malaysia against the demons of religious extremism, racial hatred and a fragile and volatile global economy."

"Will he (Abdullah) be able to dispense with the authoritarianism that to many, has made Dr Mahathir look more like a jailer than a guardian of his people," the article asked.

The writer goes on to say that the idea of Dr Mahathir installing himself as "a sort of honorary president for life" as Lee Kuan Yew has done in Singapore, was unappealing and that the greatest service Dr Mahathir could render Malaysia all these years would be to retire.

"The criticisms in the articles are clearly lopsided," said Najib.

Najib said the Government can ban the publication but does not have such intentions.

However, the article briefly mentions that Dr Mahathir's administration has brought success to Malaysia compared to its neighbours.

Dr Mahathir was also said to be a good candidate for the OIC secretary-general post as he could "bridge the chasm of misunderstanding between the Islamic and Western worlds."

"Most important, Malaysia is an economic success story, well integrated

into the world trading system and steadily increasing the living standards of its people ... Malaysia offers a good role model for the rest of the OIC," it said.

It also said: "On balance, Dr Mahathir has done well by Malaysia. "But he should not linger."