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Pak Lah to build on success (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today pledged to build on the foundation of success bequeathed to him by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to achieve excellence, glory and distinction for the nation.

The Prime Minister, in thanking his predecessor for leaving this legacy, said it had sustained political stability, strengthened national unity, promoted economic development and given meaning to independence.

"I shall take stock and guidance from the successes of the leaders who came before me and seek the co-operation of my Cabinet colleagues and all segments of society," he said when tabling a motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir at the Dewan Rakyat this morning.

He said Dr Mahathir had served the nation with dedication and pledged to continue the struggle to defend its sovereignty, independence and prosperity.

The Prime Minister said he would do this through the policies, strategies and programmes introduced and promoted by his predecessor.

He said he would continue efforts to enhance the excellence of the people through means founded upon the spirit of the Federal Constitution, the Rukunegara and Vision 2020.

"The people and the country greatly appreciate Dr Mahathir's services, which he has discharged with integrity and responsibility. He has brought this country to the altar of excellence and allowed us to emerge as a nation that is respected throughout the world," he said to thunderous thumping of tables by MPs.

Abdullah went on to list the host of projects and programmes initiated by Dr Mahathir and the conferences attended by him.

While he was composed throughout his maiden speech in the Dewan Rakyat as Prime Minister which took 35 minutes, Abdullah became emotional at the end when his voice cracked as he formally moved the motion of thanks.

As Abdullah said "to You Allah, your humble servant turns for guidance and inspiration, strength and fortitude, patience and determination", he was forced to halt between words, bending over his text to contain himself.

The motion was seconded by MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting who said Dr Mahathir had given Malaysians selfconfidence and pride, and was "extraordinary" in his abilities and energy.

"The Chinese community has always held his leadership in high regard as he was always sensitive to its problems and was willing to help.

"The MCA also extends its highest appreciation to Dr Mahathir for his positive role as BN chairman in helping the party leadership when it faced some challenges."

He pledged the MCA's support for Abdullah, saying it was the best way to thank Dr Mahathir.

In the afternoon, the Dewan Rakyat unanimously endorsed Abdullah's appointment as the fifth Prime Minister with a motion of support to him.

Backbenchers Club president Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamed tabled the motion which was seconded by Datuk Goh Siew Huat (BN-Rasah).

Mohd Zin was confident that Abdullah would lead the nation on the right path as he possessed exceptional leadership qualities.

He said Abdullah's solid religious background would ensure Islam was given due importance in the process of governance with adequate focus on consultation that would strengthen national unity, brotherhood, racial

tolerance besides developing the ummah.

"He has the determination and political will to implement the Islamic Economic System without hesitating or waiting for the `perfect' system as he believes loopholes in its implementation can be rectified along the way."

The Shah Alam MP, who later wound up the debate on the motion, said backbenchers would fully support Abdullah in changes he may make in the administration.

Earlier, the House debated the motion of thanks to Dr Mahathir with the main speakers being heads of BN component parties.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu described Dr Mahathir as "one in a million".

"The people must follow his fighting spirit as an example. It is this spirit that has made Malaysia peaceful and prosperous, economically and politically," he said.

United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (Upko) president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said the manner in which Dr Mahathir had stepped down showed that he was truly democratic in his leadership style.

"Dr Mahathir, whom some label as a dictator, handed power to his successor in a fully democratic manner by resigning from his position."

Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu president Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said Malaysians owed Dr Mahathir a debt of gratitude for gaining the country the respect of the world.

Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) deputy chairman Datuk Seri Law Hieng Ding said Dr Mahathir was not only the pride of Malaysians but was respected by the world and had succeeded in bringing about integration of the peninsula with Sabah and Sarawak.

Abdullah, in his speech, described Dr Mahathir as a visionary who had the tenacity and capacity to convert his vision into reality.

"He is a statesman who has inspired his people to achieve their aspirations. He is a statesman ahead of his time and has enabled the hopes of the future to become reality today," he said.

He also recorded the Dewan Rakyat's highest appreciation and gratitude to Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and her family for the sacrifice of Dr Mahathir's energies, thought and time to the country, his people, the region and the Muslim and developing world.

The Prime Minister said the spirit of the New Economic Policy would not be neglected since it ensured the efforts to restructure society would strengthen national unity and eradicate poverty.

"The spirit of power sharing, which is the core of our system of governance and of nationbuilding efforts, will continue to be strengthened.

"The success that we have inherited cannot be continued if creativity and innovation do not become part of our culture. First World infrastructure must go hand in hand with First World mentality. Human resource development has to be enhanced to ensure that the growth of the Malaysian people balances physical, mental and spiritual aspects."

Abdullah said the private sector was acknowledged as the engine for economic growth and should play a more important and active role in creating employment and economic opportunities and should implement an efficient delivery system.

The public sector, on the other hand, he said, must radically move beyond its role as mere regulator and law enforcer. "It must become more effective, efficient and a transparent facilitator, able to respond speedily to the needs and requirements of the private sector.

"The public sector shoulders the responsibility of ensuring national policies are implemented effectively and transparently, reflecting a clean

and incorruptible image.

"Corruption is an odious crime. We must explore more effective methods to deal with it and emphasise prevention which is equally as important as punishment. Our resolve to have a civil service that is corruptionfree should not be weakened by unhealthy practices in the private sector or by parties that are outside the government that contribute to this disease."

Later wrapping up the debate, Abdullah thanked MPs for their wishes and comments.

"I take note of the views, criticism and reminders from MPs and will consider these things."

The House passed the motion of thanks after a debate.