

30/11/2003

Some 'vocal' advice for Kak Endon and aides

Ahmad A. Talib

SOME members of the media - those who were fasting or otherwise - were invited to break fast with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last week. It was a simple and filling affair. After maghrib prayers led by Pak Lah, we gathered back at the dinner table to continue with our unfinished business. Pak Lah sat with some of us before moving on to other tables to chat with other guests.

Some of my colleagues had to strain their ears to listen to Pak Lah. At some point his voice was reduced to almost a whisper. When asked why, Pak Lah said he has been on a talking spree in recent weeks and this has affected his voice. I realise that one has to have strong vocal cords to hold high office. Pak Lah must pace himself because he, and his vocal cords, have much work in the coming months.

After he announces the dissolution of Parliament (and only he knows when), as the Prime Minister and chairman of Barisan Nasional, Pak Lah will have to go on the campaign trail.

Judging from his work rate when he was Deputy Prime Minister under Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Pak Lah can also tire the slow walkers among us. While his feet will carry him all over the country, to every nook and corner, we must make sure that his vocal cords can effectively deliver whatever messages to be conveyed.

Perhaps, Pak Lah, with the help of his wife Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood, should ease up a bit from all the scheduled speaking engagements in the next couple of weeks.

Kak Endon should insist that Pak Lah speaks less and take strong medicines to help him get his voice back. Other than the pills and tablets prescribed by his personal physician, may I suggest the following remedy.

I've seen him drink tamarind juice, which many believe has a cooling effect. I think he should continue to do so, and drink it without ice, of course.

Next, he may want to consider air nasi sejuk (cold rice water). It may sound strange to many people but I know many people who resort to do this when they have sore throats.

It's simple to make - take some left-over rice and put them in a mug filled with water and leave it exposed to the morning dew. This means one has to leave the mug outside the house, usually on a stool or bench. Drink the water and throw away the rice just before or after the subuh prayers, accompanied by the usual selawat. God willing, the throat will sound as good as new after taking this a couple of mornings.

Today marks exactly one month of Pak Lah's prime ministership. Inevitably, he is being watched, by politicians (within and outside Umno), the rakyat and the rest of the world.

There was a note of general approval over the way he handled the Umno protem committee covering 191 divisions. While his move to replace high-profile stalwarts in Kelantan has caused more than a stir in the east coast State, non-Umno members seemed excited by the change. Whether or not the change will lead to positive developments in Pas-controlled Kelantan remains to be seen, but Umno insiders seemed to greet the change with words of encouragement for Pak Lah.

Again, inevitably, the announcement triggered fresh SMSs (short text messages over the cellular phones) concerning the general election. One of them read: "Is there truth to the rumour that Parliament will be dissolved

on Dec 2, nominations to be held on the 11th and polling on the 20th?" Well, no one really knows. I ran some checks and contacts in high places seemed to think otherwise.

For one, they argued, Umno had just finalised the protem committee list and State liaison committees have to meet to get the grassroots machinery in place. Then again, some argued that several BN chiefs are away on leave while one or two may be travelling overseas on official business.

It's unlikely the elections will be held then, they said. One senior Umno leader met during the Hari Raya rounds said that there's also more talk of a joint Federal and Sabah State elections coming up.

The possibility of this taking place is not remote given a strong Umno now and a BN that's riding on a wave of "feel good" atmosphere all round. And then, there's the "big appointment" that has yet to be filled before the Prime Minister gazes into his crystal ball to dissolve Parliament. Why