

Relaxed Abdullah faces the press
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The last time Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi faced the press corps was at 3am on March 9 to announce that Barisan Nasional (BN) had attained a simple majority and would form the next federal government.

MCPX

Other than an exclusive interview with Bernama TV, Abdullah had shunned the press, amidst calls for him to step down from within Umno.

abdullah ahmad badawi 2008 cabinet line up 180308 06Far different from the weary and grim-faced leader that he was on polling night, Abdullah today could even afford to joke when he was told he was on air already - a few minutes ahead of the press conference scheduled to begin at noon.

By then, the cameras were showing him grumbling good-naturedly while trying to find room on the podium for his list, among a thicket of microphones and tape-recorders.

The much-relaxed premier said with a chuckle: "You let me know lah, when I'm on TV. I'm on TV now? No, I'm not, I'm standing here".

While it may seem charming to some or 'blur' to others, this simple exchange set the mood for a comfortable press conference.

Prior to reading out the list of appointees, he said that his cabinet would continue to represent all the races within the BN fraternity and that he hopes it will be effective in carrying out the government's plans.

khairy umno general assembly 050406While everyone waited to see if his line-up would include son-in-law and new Rembau parliamentarian Khairy Jamaluddin (photo), journalists were caught off-guard when regular names were dropped instead.

Veteran ministers Rafidah Aziz, Jamaluddin Jarjis, Azmi Khalid, close aide Radzi Sheikh Ahmad and Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor were conspicuous by their absence from Abdullah's list.

During the 20-minute session, punctuated with brief explanations relating to his choices, Abdullah also said he had decided not to appoint any parliamentary secretaries, thereby bringing down the number of appointments.

Less of a surprise though was that his new cabinet now has 27 ministries instead of the previous 32, after several portfolios were merged. The number of ministers and deputies were also cut from 90 to 68.

Q&A session

What about those who contested but lost?

I've considered all those people as well but have not decided to put them in the cabinet. This is the prime minister's prerogative which I don't have to explain.

Rafidah Aziz is one of the longest serving ministers. Why has she been left out?

(Curtly) I don't have to discuss why here. I think that she should also make way for someone new to take over.

The Indian community has said it wants two full ministerships. Have you considered that?

Yes, I've considered it but it is not possible at the moment. I feel the human resources (ministry) is an important portfolio for them.

And I think that it will give (the minister) a chance to address unemployment issues and provide training opportunities to people in the rubber and oil palm estates where many Indians reside. A lot of issues have risen from these areas and new villages too.

In the aftermath of the elections, there were calls for you to step down. Will you resign?

As far as I'm concerned, I'm here. I've been given a mandate, a very strong mandate, I believe. I'm not one to shirk my responsibility and I've no intention to disappoint the many who have provided us the support.

It is my intention to continue and I've the support of the Umno and the Barisan Nasional leadership. Next (question)!

What do you expect of the new cabinet?

My expectation is that they will perform better than before. And I believe that based on the choice that we have made, they are capable and be able to fulfill our agenda.

abdullah ahmad badawi 2008 cabinet line up 180308 08I'd like to tell you that this term...I wish to emphasise the vigorous implementation of our projects. I've heard many times, read many articles and even comments from many people that 'Pak Lah has worked out the policies very well and he has very good projects, but was very short on implementation'.

Yes, we were very much involved in planning and determining the policies and the projects to be implemented. And this has taken a lot of our time.

Some are being implemented and some are already been launched. And it is my intention to see that all these projects will be vigorously implemented and will be effective. And that it will deliver the objectives they were intended for.

It has taken 10 days for you to formulate the cabinet. Is there any pressure?

No, I was not under any pressure. I did it all on my own.

There are allegations by (PKR de facto leader) Anwar Ibrahim that Najib (Abdul Razak) is corrupt. Why is he still appointed?

There is no proof to show that Najib is not clean. People can make all sorts of allegations but they have to show prove that corruption has taken place.

anwar ibrahimEven he (Anwar, photo) is not free from allegations.

What is important is that there is no evidence to support that. People can talk about six boxes, 20 boxes or 30 boxes (of documents)...but the fact is that there is no evidence.

I've made sure that I've the latest information from the BPR (Anti-Corruption Agency) and the police. And with that I've made the various appointments.

Is there more representation from Sabah and Sarawak?

Yes, there are more at the deputy minister level.

Are you aware of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's letter calling for an Umno EGM?

Yes, it has been sent to the Umno secretariat and they will deal with it.

Will there be an EGM?

Not at the moment. We've no plans to hold any EGM at this time.

How is your relationship with the DPM?

najib tun razak 01I've the best relationship with Najib (photo). Why are you asking this sort of question? There are many accusations concerning many people.

Why is Najib not here today?

Najib is not the deputy prime minister yet. He will only be DPM tomorrow...you want to read into so many things.