

'Thank you, point taken': Pak Lah to voters
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The plunge in support for the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in the recent general election was a strong reminder to the government that it had not fulfilled its reform pledges, conceded Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. MCPX

abdullah ahmad badawi polling day vote 080308 05Abdullah pledged that in his second-term as prime minister, there will be a "bold agenda" to address the people's concerns.

The premier touched on this issue when delivering his keynote address at the Invest Malaysia 2008 conference in Kuala Lumpur this morning.

It was his first major public address since the March 8 polls which saw the opposition taking 82 parliamentary seats and storming into power in four additional states apart from Kelantan.

"The result of the elections was a strong message that I have not moved fast enough in pushing through with the reforms that I promised to undertake.

"I thank the Malaysian people for this message. Point well made and point taken," said Abdullah who was reading through a seven-page prepared text.

'Reform cabinet'

The prime minister said that the new government was already in the process of "rejuvenation" with the formation of his "reform cabinet" last week.

"Half of the cabinet comprises new faces - a number of them are independent personalities appointed to key portfolios," he added.

With the new cabinet in place, Abdullah stated that his main priority now was to support lower income groups who are suffering from surging prices of consumer goods.

"Firstly, we aim to mitigate the impact of rising world prices for lower income households, and limit the wastage and losses caused by subsidies.

"Secondly, we will review the implementation of our economic plans to ensure that its benefits will touch the lives of those who need them the most.

"Thirdly, we will continue our work towards reducing income gaps between and within ethnic groups, while ensuring fairness for all Malaysians," he said.

New and renewed pledges

Abdullah also pledged to "drastically" reduce the crime rate, tackle corruption aggressively, support judicial reform and ensure "a fair number of places of worship for Malaysians of all

religions."

"These were the major issues that resonated with voters regardless of ethnicity, background, gender or age," he said.

While anti-crime and anti-corruption campaigns were part of Abdullah's election pledges in 2004, his pledges on judicial reform and places of worship are fresh.

Opposition parties have been nitpicking on Abdullah's previous administration based on these issues during the general election campaign.

Meanwhile, Abdullah also pledged to continue federal-backed economic corridors and signaled that discussion with non-BN state governments were in the pipeline.

"I remain, as I have always been, the prime minister for all Malaysians. Our manifesto has clearly stated our commitment to reduce the gaps between regions.

"Therefore, we intend to have productive working relationships with all state governments to ensure that the corridor plans will be successful," he said.

Fuel prices to go up?

At a press conference later, Abdullah said details on his policy on low-income earners will be unveiled in due time.

To a question, Abdullah hinted that price control mechanisms may undergo drastic changes. This includes the possibility of scrapping subsidies for certain goods.

"There are limitations to price control (mechanisms). Of course the market would be the most important determinant," he said.

parliament mtuc fuel price hike protest 270306Abdullah was also non-committal when asked if his administration would maintain present fuel prices.

"We have to live with the present prices. When we make the announcement (on fuel prices), it is hoped that the situation would have change," he said without elaborating.

New Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Shahrir Samad had on Sunday called the current price controlling mechanism "a joke" and has signaled sweeping reforms to come.