

Pak Lah our 'Father of Democratisation'?
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Gerakan President Koh Tsu Koon has called Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as the Father of Democratic Reforms.

I initiated this proposal in May in my article entitled 'Abdullah Badawi – Father of Democratisation?' and I am happy that Koh has responded to my proposal.

In the article, I stated:

'On Sept 25, 2004, Abdullah said, "They wanted to know that since Tunku Abdul Rahman has been given the title of 'Father of Independence', Tun Razak 'Father of Development', Tun Hussein Onn 'Father of Unity', Dr Mahathir 'Father of Modernisation', what title is to be given to Pak Lah? P

"Pak Lah wants only to be known as Pak Lah. I will carry on my own way".

Dare I suggest that maybe one day Malaysians will remember Abdullah as the 'Father of Democratisation'?

We cannot deny that Abdullah is at the receiving end of a barrage of criticisms, especially around his leadership style. Despite that, his less controlling style has been good for liberal democracy in our country, and may have produced unintended and unplanned 'side-effects'. That is the irony. The democratic benefits may have been produced unintentionally.

Under Abdullah's premiership, and especially after the 2008 general elections, we can see three perhaps unplanned outcomes, namely:

1. Parliamentary democracy - With the surge in the number of opposition MPs after the March 2008 elections, the Malaysian parliament suddenly has more voices for check and balance.

After half -a-century of independence, it is only under Abdullah that this became possible. His premiership inadvertently allowed our parliamentary institution to be strengthened, which is an important step in democratisation.

2. Federalism - Federalism is a means to strengthen states and to limit the powers of the federal government. The success of Pakatan Rakyat in five states only happened under Abdullah.

As a result, we now have an opportunity like never before to strengthen federalism, especially if the federal government respects the decisions of the people in the five states and devolves more powers to the state administrations.

This is obviously unwanted by Abdullah himself, but still is a very positive step in democratisation.

3. Democracy within Umno - Abdullah has been criticised not just by those from outside Umno, but also by his colleagues in Umno. The internal turbulence within Umno is good for

the party itself.

I have no doubt that if people were to criticise Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he was head of Umno in the same way, they would face certain political death.

Whether intentional or not, silencing critics is not what Abdullah does and as a result, he has opened a new democratic era in Umno wherein those who disagree with the party leadership can speak up at least with less fear than before of being disciplined.

This is another positive step in democratisation.

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