

Abdullah gets royal 'send off'
Malaysiakini.com
Feb 16, 09
Rahmah Ghazali

It was the opening of the new session of Parliament, but even the King's focus was on the prime minister who will step down office next month.

In the Royal Address, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin took note of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's achievements during his six-year tenure since November 2003.

"I would like to express my appreciation to Abdullah on his leadership and all his contributions to the country especially on its democracy, accountability, integrity, fight against corruption, the independence of judiciary and also Islam Hadhari," said the King.

Abdullah remained expressionless when the close-circuit television camera focused on him, and even when Barisan Nasional backbenchers thumped their tables loudly to show support.

Tuanku Mizan said he was confident that the country would be successfully helmed by Najib Abdul Razak, currently deputy premier, when the transition of power takes place.

He further complimented Abdullah (centre in photo) on his success in establishing the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and Judicial Appointments Commission, saying this is "clear evidence that my government has kept its word to fight against corruption and abuse of power".

"I am convinced these two commissions will increase the confidence of the public and strengthen the nation's integrity," he added.

"Don't disunite the people'

However, the King expressed disappointment with certain quarters who play up racial issues both inside the House and elsewhere.

Among issues that have ignited heated debate are the alleged marginalisation of minority races and ketuanan Melayu (Malay supremacy).

"I want to stress that my government will not hesitate to take action against anyone who tries to disunite the people. I would also like to say that everyone's rights are protected and respected as enshrined in the Federal constitution," he said to applause.

The House also heard that the monarch takes a serious view of "false news and lies that are spread all over the Internet, which only creates confusion among the people".

"We should learn from history where the fall of empires and civilisations have been caused by lies, jealousy and division among the people...the citizens should instead be wise in evaluating news," he said.

'Focus on economy'

Met for their response after the opening ceremony, opposition politicians expressed greater interest in discussing the RM7 billion stimulus package announced by Najib last year rather than issues lined up for this sitting.

The package included injecting RM4.8 billion into the economy through a reduction of contributions to the EPF retirement fund, RM1.2 billion to build low- and medium-cost houses and hundreds of millions of ringgit for the building, improvement and maintenance of basic infrastructure and public amenities.

Tian Chua, the PKR representative for Batu, said he hopes for focus on the economic situation to limit the impact of recession and to prevent retrenchment of workers.

"I hope this stimulus package does not look mainly at numbers, but comes up with an estimation of job opportunities for locals under this package," he said.

PKR's Bandar Tun Razak MP, Abdul Khalid Ibrahim - also Selangor menteri besar - said the government should be more open.

"We would like to see whether the budget is enough to help the Malaysian economy and ensure that all the discussion is very detailed and targeted to the needs of Malaysians," he said.

The 20-day session ending March 19 will see debate on the Special Complaints Commission Bill the final piece of reform legislation that Abdullah wants to push through before relinquishing his premiership.

The SCC was first presented to Parliament in December 2007, but was withdrawn due to overwhelming protest.

Other Bills expected to be debated are the Witness Protection Bill, Judges' Ethics Committee Bill and the DNA Bill.