

Abdullah: Give local artists a chance

• By Koh Lay Chin

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KUALA LUMPUR: Fully mindful of his late wife's role as the consummate arts supporter, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi took on that role yesterday with gusto.

Take a break from fawning over foreign artwork or designs, and pay more attention to local talents, the Prime Minister said, pointing out that Malaysians had to support local artists —just like his late wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, had done so passionately.

He said Malaysians were easily captivated by art pieces and creations of foreign painters, sculptors and visual artists, and did not give the same high regard to local ones. "I am rather sad because we are flooded by all sorts of works, such as paintings, designs or fashions, from other nationalities, "but we are not ready to provide encouragement to our own.

"They need the confidence to present their creations to us. We must let them know we are ready to recognise their talents," he said.

Abdullah was speaking at the launch of artist Raja Azhar Idris' exhibition entitled *Fragility... Versatility — A Tribute to Kak Endon*, which is dedicated to the memory of Endon.

The exhibition, held at Raja Azhar's Art Case Galleries in City Square Centre, features "brand new works on glass, with references to batik in the artwork,

Raja Azhar has won numerous international awards, including the St Kilda Art Prize in 1980 and 1981, when he was a student at the prestigious Victoria College of Art in Australia.

Abdullah said his wife had been a fan of Raja Azhar, bringing



Abdullah (right), accompanied by daughter, Nori (centre), admiring one of Raja Azhar's glass artworks at the exhibition yesterday.—NST picture by Fathil Asri

home a piece of his artwork at one point. "She brought it back and I said: 'Apa ni?' (What is this), and did not really appreciate it at the time. But the more I looked at it, it became more beautiful in my eyes.

"I didn't really know Him (Raja Azhar) until she told me he was an artist with huge potential and creativity," he said.

Abdullah said Malaysian artists had a unique focal point for their creations in the nation's multi-cultural diversity. "Combine all of it in one art form, and it can symbolise Malaysia's image as a nation full of diverse cultures and arts.

"Let us create our own image,

before others do that for us. Local artists, therefore, have a very special role in this," he said.

Later, at a farewell function held for Tan Sri Samsudin Osman, Abdullah praised the former top civil servant for having an excellent service record as the Chief Secretary to the Government.

He said Samsudin, who began his career as a civil servant in 1969, was a truthful, fair and a reasonable man.

"He, as the Cabinet secretary, not only recorded all decisions made at Cabinet meetings but also gave valuable advice and guidance on civil service to the Govern-

ment whenever it was needed. His views were always objective and good."

The Prime Minister said Samsudin was well-versed in guidelines and policies pertaining to civil servants and the service.

Thanking Samsudin for his excellent service, Abdullah said he was also good as the middleman in solving problems when there were disputes between ministers, and their secretaries-general.

Samsudin, who, was the Chief Secretary for five years and one month, retired on Saturday and was succeeded by Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan.