

Musa: Mark of a very good leader

KUALA LUMPUR: "An elegant silence."

This was the high praise reserved by former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Musa Hitam for Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

Commenting on the Prime Minister's handling of the sharp criticisms from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Musa described Abdullah's choice of not responding to Dr Mahathir's statements the previous day as a wise decision.

"It is what I call elegant silence. It is the mark of a very, very good leader," he said.

Musa also praised Deputy

Prime Minister Datuk Najib Razak who although was in India, responded immediately to Dr Mahathir's statements by calling for the Cabinet and the people to support the Prime Minister.

This, he said, showed the unity of the two leaders, despite statements from Dr Mahathir that he had made a mistake in choosing to elevate Abdullah instead of Najib, whom he said was his first choice.

As he praised Abdullah, so did Musa criticise his former boss.

He said Dr Mahathir had been harsh in his criticism, going against "tradition and protocol"

in making his comments.

"I feel heavy-hearted to comment about what Dr Mahathir said as I have not been involved in political issues or the Government for a long time. But what was said by Dr Mahathir about the leadership of the Government, of the party and the country is negative and serious," he said, adding he decided to speak up because he did not want the situation to get out of hand.

Musa stepped down as deputy prime minister in February 1986 following differences of opinion with Dr Mahathir.

Abdullah stays out of fray

• By Joniston Bangkuai
jon@nst.com.my

SANDAKAN: He could have come out with guns blazing.

With Cabinet ministers and Barisan Nasional component parties rallying strongly around him, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was on solid ground to counter Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's criticism on Wednesday with some strong language.

He would have been given latitude by the public to hit back, after being singled by the former prime minister only 24 hours before.

But Abdullah chose elegance over a street brawl, unity over confrontation. More importantly, he chose national interest over personal discomfort.

"There's no need to expand on it," he said. "Tun (Dr Mahathir) is free to say anything. It is not a problem to me, because our country is democratic."

Try as they did, reporters could not get him to respond to any of the criticisms directed against him by Dr Mahathir. When asked whether he was surprised that Dr Mahathir had accused him of betrayal and ingratitude, he replied: "That's enough. Let us talk about other matters."

During a meeting with foreign and local media at his office, Dr Mahathir accused Abdullah of betraying his trust by reversing many of his decisions, going so far

as to imply that he had picked the wrong person to lead Malaysia.

"It is unfortunately a common trait for me," Dr Mahathir told reporters he had invited to the Perdana Leadership Institute. "I make a habit of choosing the wrong people perhaps... I chose him and I expected a certain degree of gratitude."

Dr Mahathir also complained that the new Government had cancelled several major projects initiated during his two decades in power, despite assurances they would be carried out after he left office.

Abdullah refused to be drawn into any towel-snapping with his predecessor despite some provocative statements by the latter recently. Yesterday was no different.

He preferred to talk about his commitment to fulfilling all promises made before the last general election.

"I want to focus on repaying the trust given by the people to the BN under my leadership," he said, noting that he had only been the Prime Minister for 2½ years.

He said the recently unveiled Ninth Malaysia Plan would be the instrument for his administration to deliver on all promises contained in BN's 2004 election manifesto.

He reiterated that improving the public delivery system and transforming Malaysia into a developed country by 2020 were

important goals.

Abdullah said he was touched by the support given by everyone.

"It shows that you have confidence in my leadership and it will spur me to work harder for you. At this moment I want to focus my attention and strength towards making the 9MP a success. We have all accepted 2020 as the date to reach developed nation status, we have only 14 years to go," he said.

There was no trace of stress or worry on Abdullah's face as he toured the Taman Mesra people's housing project here. Perhaps this was due to the overwhelming support he has received since Dr Mahathir's attack. They came from Cabinet ministers, BN component leaders and even corporate figures.

Last night was no different. Abdullah received a standing ovation at the Dewan Yu Kuan in Sandakan when he attended a "Perdana Menteri Bersama Rakyat" dinner.

Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman said the organisers added another 700 places outside the hall to accommodate community members who wanted to show support for Abdullah.

In his speech, Musa pledged support for Abdullah's stewardship, saying the Prime Minister enjoyed the full support of BN component parties.

His comments were received with applause and cheers.

"Tun Dr Mahathir had been an exceptional leader for Malaysia. Under his leadership, Malaysia reached great heights and I am proud of the achievements he made during his time as Prime Minister. However, I feel that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi must be given a chance now to provide leadership for Malaysia in his own style. And I believe with the blessings of Tun Dr Mahathir and the support of the people, Datuk Seri Abdullah will be an able and excellent leader too. He is very consultative and all decisions made in Cabinet were taken after long and lengthy discussions where everybody was given a chance to voice their opinions."



Women, Family and Community Development Minister
Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil

"This is all very distressing for business, and it must be hoped it does not develop into a destabilised political environment. Business depends on certainty and stability in this country as in any other and with the present administration as much as with any previous one. Political stability is one of Malaysia's strongest cards, and it should not be undermined."

Kuala Lumpur Business Club president and Malaysia Airlines chairman
Datuk Dr Munir Majid



"Barisan Nasional parties are very confident of Abdullah's integrity. We are grateful to Dr Mahathir for picking Abdullah as his successor. The people ratified Abdullah's leadership through the massive mandate received by the BN during the elections. As a Cabinet member, I can vouch that all Government decisions are made collectively."

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu

"Tun Dr Mahathir should not give the misconception of the existence of two Governments. He should let his successor have absolute power to deal with the affairs of the country in the best interest of the people. There is no breach of commitment on Abdullah's part in making changes to the policies of the previous Government since it is the existing Government that is accountable for the implementation of the policies."

Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia (Hua long) president
Datuk Seri Lim Gait Tong

"Abdullah should be given a chance to administer the country according to his own style. Every leader has his own plans to develop the country and there is no need for others to teach him what to do. Any decision made by the current Government leader is in accordance with the prevailing environment."

Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid

"The Prime Minister has always talked about the huge contribution Dr Mahathir gave to the country and he has said repeatedly that he wants Vision 2020 to succeed. When you look carefully at the Ninth Malaysia Plan, we see a Government really working hard to continue that vision."

Deputy Works Minister Datuk Mohd Zin Mohamad