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'Transition plan a boost for Umno'

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday the plan for transition of power he announced yesterday was expected to strengthen Umno solidarity and the government's position in focusing on efforts to implement the promises made in the last general election.

The prime minister also said that as such, he and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak would be able to concentrate on national development efforts, and in fact work even harder at that.

"I will maintain the same pace. I will not slow down."

"In fact, I have to do more now," he told the national news agency, Bernama, and

RTM Radio in a special interview at Sri Perdana, the prime minister's official residence, here.

Abdullah expressed his determination, through his combination with Najib, to strengthen Umno and garner the support of the people.

"We have to gain the confidence of the people," he said.

Under the plan for transition of power, Abdullah is to hand over the post of prime minister, chairmanship of the Barisan Nasional and presidency of Umno to Najib in June 2010.

Asked whether the move to voluntarily withdraw in 2010 was a sacrifice he was making for the party and country, Ab-

dullah said: "It is up to the people to determine that."

On the candidate for the post of deputy prime minister after the transition of power, Abdullah said he would leave that decision to Najib.

"It is not right (for me) to determine (the candidate). Let him (Najib) do that."

Abdullah was convinced that Najib would not have any problem selecting his deputy because there were many Umno leaders of integrity.

Elaborating on the advantage of the announcement of the power transition plan, Abdullah said it would put party members at ease, and ensure the party elections at all levels were conducted well.

He said too much politicking prior to this had caused uneasiness among the people and the announcement had helped to bring relief.

Asked why he had chosen 2010 and not any other year to step down, Abdullah said he wanted to ensure the success of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, which ends in 2010, particularly from the aspect of eradicating hardcore poverty.

He also wanted to reform the judiciary and fight corruption.

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"I still have my responsibilities. In the two (coming) years

as the prime minister, I will use the authority that I have in the best manner possible."

Abdullah also said that the two-year period (until June 2010) would give Najib the opportunity to be well-prepared to take over the administration of the country and party.

Abdullah said Najib would not be left with too short a time prior to the next general election despite taking over the administration in June 2010 because the work of the government and party continued unabated from the time after the last general election in March this year.

"I was the first person to mention this at a closed-door meeting with information offi-

cers. "I said whatever is brok will be mended, whatever lost will be replaced."

"We will have to go one d So, it came from me, not fr the people," he said, dismi ing any notion that his decisi was forced by pressure fr any group.

Asked about the views certain people that the pov transition plan was only aim at strengthening his positio Abdullah said: "When you e about to retire, what is there strengthen any more?"

Abdullah explained that he really wanted to retire.

Below are excer of the interv

Q: Yesterday, you announced the date of the power transition will be in 2010. Why did you choose 2010 and not any other year?

A: That is the year that the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP) ends. The year 2010 is also when I hope hardcore poverty will be eradicated.

Q: Some people say that the two-year period is too long while others say it is too short a time for you to complete the tasks to be carried out?

A: Much work has to be done and development must be carried out, work associated with the government's promises contained in its election manifesto. In addition, there are Corridor development (regional development) that have yet to be implemented.

Q: So, in 2010 you feel everything will show the desired results and success?

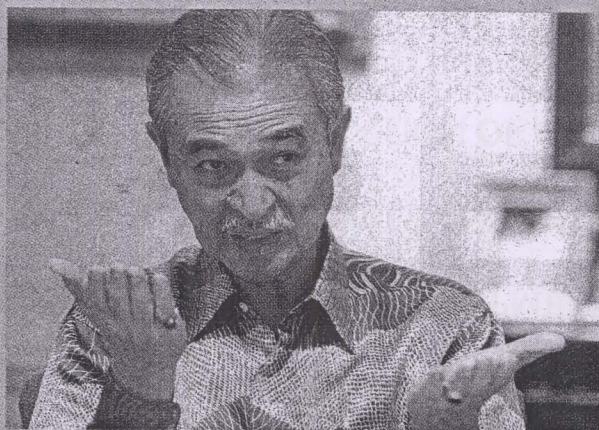
A: It is my wish that in 2010 many (of the projects) would have been completed, they are progressing well.

Q: It appears that deep in your heart, you have the responsibility to complete the work you started and fulfil the promises made.

A: I still have my responsibilities. In the two (coming) years as the prime minister, I will use the authority that I have in the best manner possible.

Q: So there was no outside pressure on the decision.

A: Actually it's like this. I was the first person to mention this at a closed-door meeting with Umno information officers from all over the country. I mentioned the leadership transition process as a normal process when the party election comes. I said whatever is broken will be mended, whatever is lost will be replaced. This is the process that takes place in Umno which is already old, so, when the word old is mentioned, what happens to us? Some say you



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi still has a lot of work to do.

are already old, have been involved in politics for a long time, and had been a party member since 1965, began to be active in administration in 1978. We will have to go one day and I too want the transition process to go smoothly.

Q: Can you explain the advantage of the transition plan that you announced compared to a contest at the top party level which can affect party stability?

A: Better for the party (if there's no contest). When they see people at the top quarrelling, everyone will be dragged in right from the branch to the division level. This will create problems, with people bringing various theories, opinions.

Q: So, the power transition plan announced aimed to maintain existing tradition in Umno?

A: The tradition is for the transition to go smoothly, if the transition is to proceed smoothly, we have to plan.

Q: What is the significance in announcing it (the transition) at this point of time when the Umno meeting at the branch level is just a day or two away?

A: If the announcement is to be made, it's better to do it before the election at the branch starts. Let the people get settled first. Before the branch election, let everyone know early, so this is what the situation is. When there is a contest, the winner feels uncomfortable, the loser will feel even worse.

We want to ensure that the party election runs smoothly.

Q: Are you certain that party members at all levels will appreciate your good intention and respect your decision?

A: Many people have shown that they are satisfied.

Q: When did you actually make the decision on the power transition?

A: When the date of the branch election was about to start, that's the time I felt it should be speeded up.

Q: Some are of the view that the succession plan was only your strategy to strengthen your position.

A: (I am) already about to retire, what is important is that we do our

work.

Even during this period, I carry on working, Datuk Seri Najib is also working.

And the work that is to be done will bring results that will be well accepted by the people. As such, it will also help to strengthen the party to gain the people's support.

Q: Will Najib be given a bigger role between now and 2010?

A: There are some roles which I will give to him. I will also have to do more. In the combination of the president and the deputy, it is about helping to strengthen the party. It's about implementing the many things we want to do.

We will also have to gain support from the rakyat. We have to gain the rakyat's confidence. We will do things which will benefit them.

Q: Is there a possibility that you will extend the period of prime ministership (after 2010) if something happens, such as an economic crisis or something else?

A: I will never do that. I won't go to Najib and tell him "They like me now, can you allow me to stay on for another one year?" If anything were to happen (such as an economic crisis), he will have to settle that.

If anything were to happen then and, when the time comes for me to go, I will go.

Q: Who are eligible to be the next deputy president?

A: I don't want to mention anybody. There will be some people who will be good candidates.

Q: How do you want to be remembered?

A: There is no need (for me to be remembered). I don't know. That's for the people to judge. I want to retire with the satisfaction that I have done something.

Q: Some people say you will be remembered as a person who raised the country to a more democratic

level.

A: The only thing I can tell you is that is the popular view that I have heard.

Q: Do you see this as a sacrifice in the interests of the party?

A: This is better for people to interpret, whether it is a sacrifice or whatever, but for me this is something that has to be done.

Q: What drove you to arrive at this decision?

A: I have been planning to retire actually.

Q: Some people say that there is not enough time left for Najib to face the general election in 2013 if he takes over power in 2010, as preparations are not being made from now.

A: The preparation for the general election begins as soon as we complete a general election. What we have done in relation to the oil price rise, we have taken measures expected to reduce the burden of the people.

Q: How is it in terms of strengthening the party?

A: When I made such a decision, it means there will be less in-fighting, there will be less campaigning. There will be campaigns (for other posts at other levels). They will contest. We will vote but the (campaigning) will not be as severe as when it involves the leaders at the top.

Q: Perhaps, Najib may name his deputy?

A: I don't think so, nearing 2010, maybe. He will have enough time to observe (who should be the candidate). If an early selection is made, then it will be difficult if something happens.

Q: Will you endorse anyone who should be the deputy to Najib?

A: That is up to Najib.