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Abdullah's aide remembers valuable advice on scandals

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PUTRAJAYA: One of the first advice Datuk Thajuddeen Abdul Wahab received from his boss, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, was to never get involved in scandals or affairs.

As the Prime Minister's principal private secretary for 18 years, Thajuddeen knew not to cross paths with Abdullah when it came to scandals.

"My diplomat wife was serving in Singapore when he asked me to join the Foreign Minister's office as principal private secretary in 1991.

"He knew I was a 'bachelor' at that time and told me he will not tolerate scandals or affairs.

"In a very nice way, he told me I will only embarrass myself and disgrace the family and I will lose my job," he said during an interview at his office.

That advice stuck with Thajuddeen while he served Abdullah from his days in Wisma Putra, Deputy Prime Minister's Office and finally the Prime Minister's Office.

Thajuddeen, 50, has known Abdullah when he was a student at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

At that time, Abdullah was already in the Government and in charge of youth affairs.

Abdullah's friendliness and warmth struck Thajuddeen deeply.

"Normally when you see a minister, you would not dare to be near him. But Abdullah's warmth was different.

"As a student, he would treat you like you had known him for a long time although you have only met him just a few months ago," he said.

After graduating with political science and economics degrees, Thajuddeen did a short stint with Malayan Banking Bhd before joining



Serving well: Thajuddeen helping Abdullah pack his stuff at the Foreign Ministry after the latter was made Deputy Prime Minister and (right) the faithful aide looking through a diary of the Prime Minister recently.

the Government service.

In 1984, Abdullah, who was then Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, "hijacked" him from Wisma Putra and asked him to go to Biro Tata Negara, where he remained until 1989.

"Due to the political situation (Abdullah was dropped from Cabinet), I decided to do my masters in defence and strategic studies in Australia.

"After my studies, I joined my wife in Singapore and found out that Pak Lah was looking for me," he said.

Even when Abdullah was in political wilderness, Thajuddeen made it a point to have *teh tarik* and *capati* with him behind Coliseum Cinema in Kuala Lumpur.

A day after Abdullah was sworn in

as Foreign Minister in 1991, Thajuddeen was offered the post as Abdullah's principal private secretary. Thajuddeen initially rejected it.

"I was only 31 and I saw many private secretaries were aging fast. I tried to convince him I was not suitable for the job.

"He told me not to worry, telling me that we will be working together and he will provide on-the-job training," he added.

It was not easy at first as the ties had to go through the employer-employee adjustment.

"Lines had to be drawn but after a while it is easy to work for him."

It is public knowledge that Abdullah is a very patient man but for someone who has been working with him closely. Thajuddeen has



seen the man losing his temper, albeit, rarely.

"I saw him getting furious with a politician and telling him off. I will not tell you what Abdullah, then, Deputy Prime Minister, told the politician. But it is safe to say the politician was shocked and turned red," he said.

Thajuddeen is planning to take a short break after which he will have to tie up loose ends.

He will also be setting up an office for Abdullah as former Prime Minister.

It will also be the time for him to look for a new place to stay since he

lost his house during the massive landslide in Bukit Antarabangsa in December.

"Just when I thought I had a nice home when I retire in eight years time, I now have to start all over again at the age of 50," he said.

The phone has been getting quieter for Thajuddeen lately and he said he is ready to leave his job at the Prime Minister's Office.

"You have done your job and when it is time to leave, you just pack up and go.

"I still have eight years to serve the Government and I look forward to my next job."