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Comment  
**TAY TIAN YAN**



SEVEN years into his retirement, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi published his authorised biography *Being Abdullah Ahmad Badawi*.

The former PM appeared thinner at the launch, his suit apparently oversized now.

Men no longer in the pinnacle of power often age unusually fast and this holds true for most people, Abdullah included. The only probable exception here is Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Abdullah's very active predecessor.

Despite all this, Abdullah was his usual amicable self, the all-familiar smile always on his face.

Three questions popped into my head all of a sudden.

In the midst of the political chaos we are wading through now, will more people start to think of Abdullah again? Will the country be any different if Abdullah were still the PM today? Did he fail the nation or the nation failed him?

For the first question, I believe the answer is an affirmative one. Judging him as prime minister, there is no question about his good character. He was everyone's Mr Good Guy, the real gentleman in politics and a leader of integrity.

He hardly lost his temper, and this was echoed by his closest aides. Unfortunately, a nice and approachable personality did not do much for his political survival.

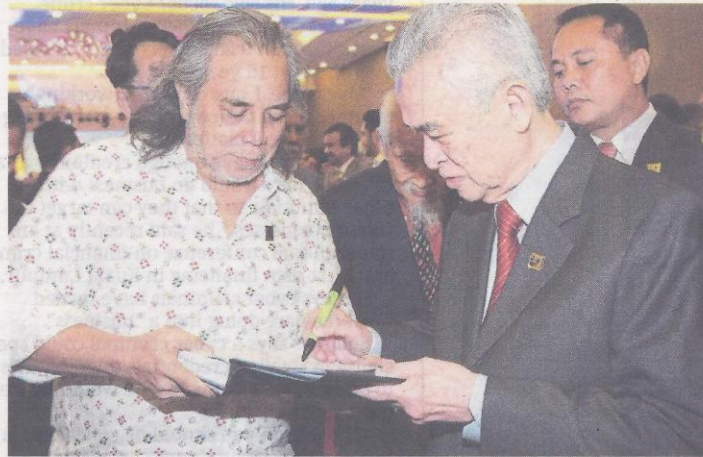
Abdullah spoke about his resignation in the later part of his autobiography. He was forced to step down under pressure from within his party. He could have wrestled out his opponents easily given his authority as Umno president and prime minister.

But what was utmost in his mind was the concern that the party and country would inevitably head towards a split, whether or not he won in the end.

# Being just Pak Lah

*The star - 6/11/2016*

His departure from politics signalled the end to an era, and an opportunity to reform the country.



## **Cherished leader:**

Abdullah signing a copy of his book for singer Datuk Ramli Sarip at Sime Darby Convention Centre in Bukit Kiara, Kuala Lumpur.

This was what he definitely didn't want to see.

When the outcome of the 2008 general election was made public, Barisan Nasional lost its two-thirds majority in the Dewan Rakyat for the first time, along with several state administrations. An instant fear swept across the country: people had no idea what would happen next or whether there would be trouble or riot in the making.

Abdullah decisively acknowledged the results, and handed over several state administrations in good will.

He displayed a very high degree of political stature. He bowed out of politics completely and has since stayed away from intervening, something that sets him apart from most other politicians.

Such a lofty personality is a rare commodity in Malaysian politics today, and this makes him all the more a cherished figure.

My second question: Will Malaysia be any different if he had stayed till today, or at least for another term?

Abdullah was well aware of what the country needed, and what Malaysians had expected of him: a clean government and a united and peaceful society.

Clean governance was his top agenda. He expanded the power of the MACC and set up the Malaysian Institute of Integrity to educate public servants on having the right attitude in terms of service. He also attempted to reverse the rampant money politics from Dr Mahathir's time.

He wanted to restore judicial independ-

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ence in the country. Several judges penalised during Dr Mahathir's time were offered apologies and compensation from the government soon after he took office.

He advocated Islam Hadhari in the place of outdated and conservative religious fundamentalism.

Unfortunately, corruption and conservatism were already deeply rooted at the time, and his philosophies hardly resonated within Umno or the conservative Malay society in general.

Of course, his own indecisiveness and a weak team were also to blame for his failure.

Abdullah did have noble aspirations but this would not see to his success in today's context given the prevailing confrontational mood in our mainstream society.

As for my last question, Abdullah's resignation to a very large extent had something to do with widespread public frustration. He wanted to do away with fuel subsidies, and this sparked large scale protests. Many voters abandoned him in the general election.

Malaysians indeed needed a good leader but they still brought him down, out of discontent.

Looking from another point of view, Abdullah used to get overwhelming support from the people, in the 2004 general election, for example. But he failed to deliver the following years after that and the people's patience ran out fast. But wait. What if we had been a little more patient and had given him another chance, would he be able to prove his worth?

A very tough question.

Anyway, he's no longer in the picture. His departure from politics signalled the end to an era, and an opportunity to reform the country. — Asia News Network