

A statesman known for his soft-spoken demeanour, religious grounding

KUALA LUMPUR: The passing of fifth prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi marks a great loss for the country. The statesman was known for his soft-spoken demeanour, religious grounding and reformist spirit.

Fondly known as “Pak Lah”, Abdullah led the country from 2003 to 2009, championing civil service reforms, strengthening anti-corruption initiatives and promoting moderate Islamic values.

Often described as Malaysia’s “Father of Human Capital Development”, he introduced the National Integrity Plan in 2004, a blueprint aimed at cultivating an ethical and responsible society.

Five years later, his administration established the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), replacing the Anti-Corruption Agency, to raise public confidence in governance.

At the MACC’s launch, he urged its officers and oversight com-

mittees to ensure it did not become mere “window-dressing”, but a credible and independent institution capable of delivering effective enforcement.

Born on Nov 26, 1939, in Kampong Perlis, Bayan Lepas, Penang, Abdullah came from a respected family of Islamic scholars.

His father, Ahmad Abdullah Fahim, better known as Ahmad Badawi, was a prominent religious figure and his lineage can be traced back to *ulama* who shaped Penang’s religious landscape.

Educated in Penang, Abdullah was an active student leader and was president of Gabungan Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung in 1962.

He graduated with a degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Malaya in 1964, joined the civil service and later entered politics after being elected as Kepala Batas member of parliament in 1978. He retired in 2013.

Abdullah held several key min-

isterial portfolios, including defence, foreign affairs and minister in the Prime Minister’s Department. He was appointed deputy prime minister in 1999. He became prime minister in 2003 following Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad’s retirement.

His leadership in the 2004 general election delivered Barisan Nasional a landslide victory, securing 198 out of 219 parliamentary seats, one of the largest mandates in Malaysian history.

During his tenure, he prioritised agriculture, education and rural development to close the urban-rural gap.

Despite internal political challenges and declining support in the 2008 general election, Abdullah was widely respected for facilitating a smooth handover to Datuk Seri Najib Razak in 2009.

His Islam Hadhari initiative reflected a progressive approach to Islamic governance, emphasising

knowledge, economic development and ethical leadership.

Even after leaving office, Abdullah remained committed to fostering interfaith understanding and global Islamic discourse.

He chaired the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies Malaysia and was the founding patron of the World Islamic Economic Forum, which promotes economic development among Muslim nations through trade and business.

He was a member of the InterAction Council and a founding member of the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council, both dedicated to resolving global conflicts through silent diplomacy and dialogue.

As the nation mourns his passing, Abdullah will be remembered as a man of principle whose politics were defined by moderation, sincerity and a steadfast belief in good governance.