

Many feel a profound sense of loss

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's passing has left a profound void not only in the nation's political history but also in the hearts of those who worked for and with him.

For his former press secretaries, Abdullah was more than just a boss. He was a gentle father figure - fondly known as Pak Lah - whose humility and sincerity shaped their most formative years in public service.

Izad Raya, who was Abdullah's press secretary for six years, said the late leader never once raised his voice in anger.

"His words were always soft, never hurtful. Even when advising or correcting someone, he did so with such grace that you would never feel small," said Izad at Abdullah's state funeral yesterday.

Another former aide, Wan Esuriyanti Wan Ahmad, said Abdullah was deeply affected by divisive political rhetoric and often warned against fuelling racial and religious tensions in Malaysia's diverse society.

"Pak Lah never sought the limelight. His leadership was rooted not in ego or ambition, but in sincerity and moral clarity," she wrote in a Facebook post.

Abdullah's former press secretary Teoh Ai Hua shared a picture of him at Seri Perdana on the eve of the Ninth Malaysia Plan launch.

"That image became my favourite. It showed the man I knew who was calm, thoughtful and entirely dedicated to the nation," he wrote on Facebook.

For Public Services director-general Tan Sri Wan Ahmad Dahlan Abdul Aziz, Abdullah always handled matters in a wise and responsible approach.

"Throughout my time serving under Abdullah, I learnt many things, especially how to tackle crises. His approach was simple - a matter or issue was never unsolvable," he said at an event in Putrajaya yesterday.

Wan Ahmad Dahlan, a civil service veteran of almost 30 years, described Abdullah as a teacher and leader.

"He was always calm, and a role model who guided civil servants. His contributions are immense as he was also a civil servant previously," he said.

Abdullah played a role in elevating the judiciary to a more respected position, too, said the first chairman of the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) Tun Zaki Azmi.

JAC, established in 2009, was aimed at ensuring a more structured and transparent process for judicial appointments.

"With the formation of the JAC, all judicial candidates are thoroughly vetted. This clearly reflects Pak Lah's commitment to ensuring that judicial appointments are not influenced by politics, but are instead based on merit," said Zaki, who served as Chief Justice for three years from 2008.

"Pak Lah is special to me because he was the one who appointed me as a judge and later as the Chief Justice. For that, I am truly grateful," said Zaki, who was



Deep sorrow: Abdullah's son Tan Sri Kamaluddin (right) and his son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin attending the State Funeral. (Bottom): Abdullah's wife, Tun Jeanne, receiving the Malaysian flag after the funeral ceremony at Masjid Negara. - Bernama

the first lawyer to be directly appointed as a Federal Court judge in 2007.

Another former Chief Justice, Tun Arifin Zakaria, said the establishment of the JAC was a major milestone in strengthening judicial independence in Malaysia.

"I was fortunate to have served as the Chief Justice of Malaya during Abdullah's tenure," said Arifin, who later became Chief Justice of Malaysia (2011-2017).

Meanwhile, Datuk Patrick Lim, a close friend of the late leader, described Abdullah as a truly humble man.

"I knew him when he was the foreign minister. We got along well - he was a nice and humble person who did not have an air of arrogance in him," he said.

A property developer from Penang, Lim said he had always thought of Abdullah as a father figure who gave him lots of advice.

"He always wanted to help peo-



ple, especially those who were marginalised," he said.

When asked how he felt being known as "Patrick Badawi" due to his close friendship with Abdullah, he brushed it aside and laughed.

"I always felt honoured to be associated with such a fine and respected person," he said.

Both of them remained good friends after Abdullah's retirement from public service and politics.