

Remembering Pak Lah's many reforms

Ex-PM shifted govt focus away from mere material growth

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PETALING JAYA: Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi really did walk the talk when it came to reforms.

As Prime Minister from 2003 to 2009, Abdullah introduced institutional and democratic reforms that set the foundation for Malaysia to move forward.

Some of the reforms he put in place are thriving while others are still a work in progress.

But there is no doubt how important all his reforms were and continue to be for the nation.

As Prime Minister, Abdullah gave bite to Malaysia's anti-graft effort by empowering the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), turning it into a full-fledged commission in 2009.

Speaking at the official launch of the Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission (MACC), Abdullah said he did not want the setting up of MACC to be seen merely as rhetoric or a rebranding, without significant change to its structure and effectiveness.

"The government is aware of issues relating to the perception of ACA's lack of autonomy, accusations of being a 'toothless tiger', selective prosecution, delays in action and unprofessional investigations which have somewhat marred the image and credibility of ACA," he said.

Datuk Seri Akhbar Satar, president of the Malaysian Integrity and Governance Society, said the national discourse in Malaysia before Abdullah was mostly focused on material development.

"Abdullah's legacy is that he was the first PM to focus on the principles of integrity and good governance."

To cultivate Malaysians to become an ethical society, Abdullah introduced the National Integrity Plan as well as set up the Malaysian Institute of

Integrity (IIM).

Akhbar, who is also a former president of Transparency International Malaysia, recalled how Abdullah remained passionate about fighting corruption even after his retirement.

"He continued to attend events at the IIM, encouraging us to be bold and to continue to speak up against corruption," said Akhbar.

Civil service reforms were also close to Abdullah's heart.

In 2006, he famously scolded "Little Napoleons" in the civil service who implemented their own set of rules.

"Obstructions that delay government development plans or private investment will not be tolerated.

"We will not allow any fiefdoms under the control of any kind of Napoleon," said Abdullah.

To cut government bureaucracy faced by the private sector, Abdullah set up the Special Taskforce to Facilitate Business (Pemudah) in 2007, while his push to reform the civil service also included the police.

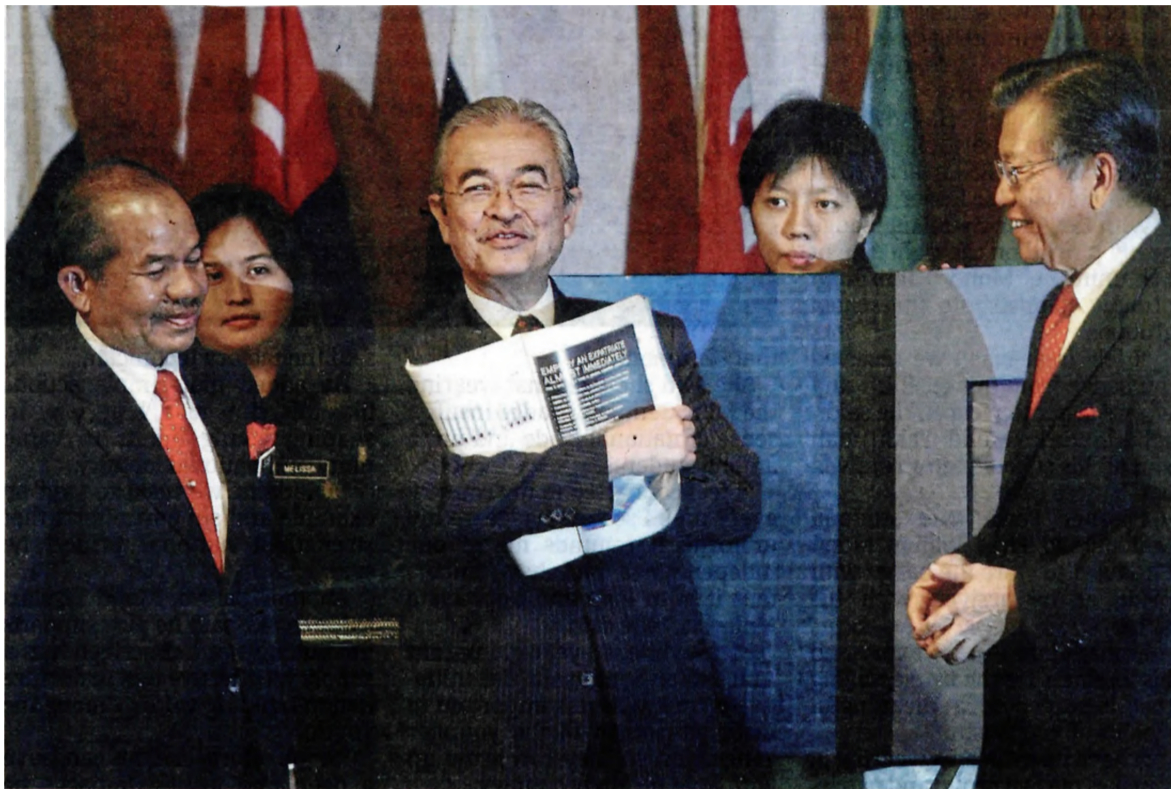
It led to the formation of a Royal Commission to Enhance the Operations and Management of the Royal Malaysia Police on Feb 4, 2004.

The commission recommended, among others, the formation of the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC).

To help remedy the country's 1988 judicial crisis involving six former judges who were dismissed from their positions, Abdullah's administration gave ex-gratia payments to the judges.

In announcing the payments in 2008, Abdullah conceded that the judiciary crisis was one that continued to haunt the nation.

Abdullah sped up efforts that led to the setting up of the Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) in 2009 to further improve the



Ahead of his time: Abdullah (centre) holding up the Pemudah 2008 annual report at the Prime Minister's Office in Putrajaya on Feb 5, 2009. (Below) The front page of The Star from Feb 25, 2009.



transparency and independence of the judiciary.

"Abdullah saw his position as one of authority, not naked power.

"He understood that power must be exercised with moral legitimacy," said Constitutional law expert Emeritus Prof Datuk Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi.

As Prime Minister, Abdullah also promoted a moderate vision of Islam.

He introduced Islam Hadhari - a policy emphasising harmony between Islamic principles and economic and technological development - to promote a moderate and inclusive national identity.

Shad recalled witnessing

Abdullah arriving at a mosque in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, unescorted, without bodyguards and without a reserved place at the front row.

"He understood the spirit of radical equality in a Muslim place of worship," said Shad.

On the economy, Abdullah started plans for various economic hubs including the Iskandar Development Region in Johor, the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) and the Sabah Development Corridor.

He also focused on modernising the agriculture sector.

"As Prime Minister, he brought a lot of changes, but people do not give him enough credit for his

reforms," said Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar, who was Foreign Minister and Home Minister during Abdullah's tenure.

As Prime Minister, Abdullah achieved a feat unmatched by his predecessors and those who came after him.

In the 2004 general election held on March 21 - five months after he became the country's leader - Abdullah led the Barisan Nasional to a stunning victory, with the coalition winning 192 of the 219 seats, or nearly 90%, in parliament.

However, Barisan lost ground at the next general election in 2008, when its tally of seats fell to 140, leading to his resignation in 2009.

"Maybe, when it comes to Pak Lah, some people only look at the negatives without considering all the positives because they don't realise all the good he has done.

"People should remember him as a gendeman leader who never bore a grudge," said Syed Hamid.

Abdullah's reforms, Shad explained, were ultimately a reflection of his personal values.

"At the height of his power, he remained humble, gentle and kind.

"He will not be known for the power a PM can wield, but by the humility and humanity he exhibited."

Fondly known as Pak Lah, Abdullah passed away in Kuala Lumpur on April 14, at the age of 85.