

Tributes pour in for 'Mr Nice Guy' of Malaysian politics

BY QIRANA NABILLA
MOHD RASHIDI
newsdesk@thesundaily.com

PETALING JAYA: Remembered as a humble and soft-spoken leader, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as the country's fifth prime minister, led the country with integrity and conviction.

As news of his passing broke, theSun spoke to members of the public who expressed deep sorrow, fondly recalling his calm demeanour and people-centric leadership.

Ipoh City Council (MBI) Ipoh Doughnut Economy Secretariat CEO Dr Zулqarnain Mohamad, 61, described his passing as "a great loss to the nation".

Reflecting on Pak Lah's legacy, he highlighted the improvements in day-to-day Malaysian life, especially within the civil service.

"Pak Lah's most significant contribution was improving the

working environment, particularly by introducing the five-day working week in 2004, allowing families to spend more time together.

"He also contributed to raising the salaries of lower-ranked civil servants, helping to uplift many from poverty. Pak Lah was truly a gentleman," he said.

MBI Works & Buildings director Arif Mohd Zainudin, 46, described Pak Lah as a man of peace who brought a gentler approach to leadership when he replaced Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's strong-handed governance.

"Being a former civil servant himself, Pak Lah always prioritised the wellbeing of government officers. One of his most critical decisions was introducing time-based promotions for government doctors. This helped slow the exodus of medical professionals from the public sector," said Arif.

He also praised Pak Lah's

diplomatic prowess, cultivated during his long tenure as the country's foreign minister, which earned him international respect.

"Pak Lah was the ultimate 'Mr Nice Guy' He was genuinely kind and humble. I remember him saying, 'if things can be resolved with a whisper, why shout?'"

"I am deeply saddened by his passing. I consider him a great statesman. Thank you, Pak Lah for all your service to this country. May Allah grant you *Jannah* (heaven)."

Abdullah joined Umno in 1964 and became the MP for Kepala Batas in 1978. Over the years, he held various key ministerial portfolios, including education, foreign affairs and defence, before being appointed deputy prime minister in 1999.

On October 31, 2003, he was sworn in as Malaysia's fifth prime minister.

Known as the "Father of Human Capital Development," Pak Lah's

administration from 2003 to 2009 focused on uplifting underdeveloped regions and rural communities, emphasising education, skill development, and public service reform.

His most iconic motto when he first took office - "Don't work for me, work with me" - reflected his collaborative leadership style and desire to unite Malaysians in nation-building.

Under the banner *Cemerlang, Gemilang dan Terbilang* (Excellent, Glorious, Distinguished), he championed good governance, efficient public administration and national unity.

On September 11, 2022, his son-in-law and then health minister Khairy Jamaluddin publicly revealed that Abdullah had dementia, and was showing signs of cognitive decline, no longer recognising his own name or those of family members.