

Legacy of exemplary leadership

Pak Lah's Cabinet fellows pay tribute to the gentleman of M'sian politics

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PETALING JAYA: The late Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (pic) was a man who displayed exemplary leadership by towering above others in his humility, say his former Cabinet fellows.

Today, Abdullah will be honoured at the Malaysia Day celebrations, held for the first time in Penang, which is also the former prime minister's home state.

The fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia (2003 to 2009) rose steadily in politics and held the same Kepala Batas parliamentary seat for eight consecutive terms.

Those who knew him well said Pak Lah (as how Abdullah was popularly addressed) was remembered most for his calm and collected demeanour, even in the face of attacks.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the legacy of Pak Lah was still very much alive.

"He was a life coach and a statesman who was a model of strength in calmness and imparted wisdom in moderation.

"The Malaysia we have today is more resilient because his approach in human development balanced intellect and spirituality," said Ahmad Zahid.



He also credited Pak Lah for introducing "Islam Hadhari" in the government.

"The National Integrity Plan of his was a systematic effort to combat corruption and build governance based on ethics and accountability. With integrity as a priority, the world had looked at Malaysia then as a beacon for feasible investment."

Plantation and Commodities Minister Datuk Seri Johari Abdul Ghani said Pak Lah's sincere concern for the masses was unmatched today.

"A big-hearted man whose main concern was the unity of the Malays and the well-being of all Malaysians.

"This is why he ensured a peaceful transition to Datuk Seri Najib Razak even when he himself had lost the support from the states back in 2009," said Johari.

Tan Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who was the Women, Family and Community minister in Pak Lah's first Cabinet, said that Pak Lah's gentle ways were a healing balm for the country.

"It was a much needed period of calm and political recalibration for the country. He expanded the Women and Family Development Ministry to include community development. With his support, we achieved milestones that changed the nation.

"Among them were the policy of 30% women in decision-making positions, which began with the public sector, and the landmark Persons with Disabilities Act.

"Pak Lah believed in inclusion, empowerment and the well-being of every Malaysian."

Former minister Tan Sri Noh Omar remembers two life-lessons from Pak Lah.

"I was a student in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and Pak Lah came visiting as the Umno vice-president.

"He was asked why he was not upset when he was not appointed to the then Cabinet.

"He said, 'Ensure your struggle is sincere, then the positions would come looking for you. If you run after positions, those positions will disappear.'

"At another time, he was the Education Minister and came under attack in Umno.

"When asked why he was not seen to be fighting back, he replied, 'How different would I be from my enemy if I did the same as him?' That was Pak Lah."

Former minister Datuk Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican said Pak Lah created a Malaysia respected by all.

"Pak Lah was not only my mentor, but also a dear friend of my late father and was a father figure to me. He taught me that true leadership is about listening carefully: 'Listen first, speak later. The people will tell you what they need if you just take the time to hear them'.

"His patience was legendary. In all my years working with him, I never heard him utter a harsh word about another person, but this gentleness was never weakness - it was his greatest strength."

Reezal stated that the respect Asean has for Malaysia today stemmed from 2005 when Malaysia was also the Chair.

"Under his leadership, Malaysia hosted the first-ever East Asia Summit, bringing together major powers including China, Russia and the United States.

"He transformed Malaysia's diplomatic style from confronta-

tional approaches to measured, practical diplomacy, creating the trust that allows Malaysia to lead Asean effectively today."

Former transport minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said Pak Lah was the one who signed his first letter of appointment to be nominated as an electoral candidate for Barisan Nasional.

"I was an MCA Youth leader then. He was also one who believed in meritocracy, and it was during his tenure as PM that there was an increase for more non-bumiputras to be awarded the JPA scholarships based on meritocracy," said Dr Wee.

Businessman and close friend of Abdullah, Leong Hup International Bhd group CEO Tan Sri Lau Tuang Nguang said Pak Lah always upheld his dignity without being proud.

"From the time he took office in 2003, he remained the same humble and down-to-earth person.

"I remember him once telling me, 'Don't call me Mr Prime Minister, just call me Pak Lah.' He would always remind his office, 'We work together, not for me.'

"When the time came for him to step down, he did so with grace - shaking everyone's hand and accepting the people's decision with dignity. His achievements were significant," said Lau.