

Pak Lah admits should have been forceful with reforms
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 — Tun Abdullah Badawi has admitted he was not tough enough with his reforms and changes while in office, however, insisting last night that he was “very clear with the reforms” he wanted as prime minister.

Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz had said that unlike Abdullah, Datuk Seri Najib Razak was clear about his reform agenda when taking office including reviewing the Internal Security Act (ISA) which is to be repealed now.

“In regards to the statement made by Dato Seri Nazri Aziz regarding my reform plans, I want to state that I was very clear with the reforms I wanted to bring,” Abdullah said in a three-paragraph statement last night, adding that there would be those who will support or oppose the changes.

“However if a leader is clear in his mind that what he wants to do is right, he must see it through. Perhaps when I was in office I should have been more forceful about it considering the resistance I was facing.

“This is what I hope Dato’ Seri Najib would do if he is clear with what he wants,” said Abdullah (picture), who was in office from October 2003 to April 2009.

The former prime minister took office vowing to be more open and liberal while announcing a slew of economic corridors and projects. He took a hands-off approach to the media and promised to stamp out corruption and abuse of power among enforcement agencies while investigating scandals involving the police force and judiciary.

Under his time, the Abdullah administration initiated several new laws to give more bite to fight graft including setting up the powerful Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) to replace the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), a Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC) to nominate judges and the Enforcement Agencies Integrity Commission (Siap) to investigate offences by enforcement agencies including the police.

But most of his initiatives floundered and Abdullah squandered his overwhelming 91 per cent support in Parliament won in 2004 to losing the customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four more states in Election 2008.

Abdullah, who ceded power to Najib on April 3, 2009, advised his successor on Monday to persevere against hardliners who might block plans to repeal a slew of security and media laws announced last Thursday.

But Nazri said Najib did not face much internal resistance to his plans to repeal the ISA because the prime minister made his intentions clear when taking office in 2009, but added the prime minister must still consider the views of conservative and pressure groups within the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition.

“During his (Abdullah’s) time, there was some opposition then as he made no clear

indication what he wanted to do but when Najib became prime minister, he made it clear that his intention was to review the ISA," Nazri said.

"This could mean amendments, abolish or to repeal the ISA. He more or less alerted various groups and the government of his intention, and this helped to prevent obstacles by BN members themselves," he added.

However, Nazri acknowledged that pressure groups within the ruling coalition remained and must be considered.

Putrajaya's reform package was seen by political observers as a bid to reclaim middle Malaysia after the disastrous handling of the July 9 Bersih rally that saw the Najib administration being widely criticised in the international media just as he was pitching the country to foreign investors.

The latest survey from local pollster Merdeka Center has also showed that Najib's popularity slid to 59 per cent this August from the 79 per cent high in May 2010, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and the Bersih clampdown.

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