

Pak Lah's legacy — his "weakness" made Malaysia strong
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BY RITA JONG

Former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Badawi's "weakness" made Malaysia stronger with its people becoming more vocal and pushing for more democratic reforms.

"That is his legacy of strength," said Dr Bridget Welsh who co-edited "Awakening: The Abdullah Years in Malaysia".

"Malaysians became more critical," she added.

Datuk Mohd Zaid Ibrahim who was also present at the launch of the book at the Bar Council headquarters this evening, pointed out that Pak Lah had big shoes to fill after he took over as prime minister from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Pak Lah is a decent and good man. He wants politics to be on an open path. He was not interested in dominance," he said, adding that Abdullah would have accomplished more if he had more time.

Perhaps, Zaid said, Abdullah should have strengthened his team when he came into power in 2004.

Instead, he chose to keep a lot of Dr Mahathir's men.

"He was the one who said there should be an interfaith commission. So we must give him credit for that.

"But he was not prepared to fight. He was not going to get involved in a bloodbath. I had told him that he had to be harder and sack a few people, but he said that was not his style."

Zaid was Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in charge of legal affairs and judicial reform from March 18, 2008 to September 17, 2008 when Abdullah was premier.

James Chin, who worked with Welsh on the book, pointed out that it was during Pak Lah's tenure that the nation flourished with new ideas.

"Cyberspace, bloggers, newsportals were actually established during his time as prime minister.

"Even the newspapers were freer then," he said. "He genuinely wanted to bring reforms. Although he did not accomplish a lot of things we wanted, he had done a lot of things we see today."

Former Court of Appeal judge Datuk Mahadev Shankar said it was during Abdullah's tenure that there was a change in the judiciary and it was in better shape after a long time.

"Sure there was a change and I am referring here to the acquittal of (Datuk Seri) Anwar Ibrahim.

"At that time, you will see the two male judges on the panel had the scrotal gumption to do

the justice that the law required them to do," he said.

The Federal Court had overturned Anwar's sodomy conviction in September 2004, just months after Abdullah came into power.

The book is a collection of 37 articles by an array of contributors, including scholars and practitioners.

Abdullah had last month said that he did not write the book and that he had no intention of attending the book launch. - September 16, 2013.

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