

Pak Lah: I will carry out my policies

The Star - 8/3/2004
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Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be facing his first general election as Prime Minister and Umno leader on March 21. *Mingguan Malaysia* interviewed him on his feelings and aspirations. Here is an extract of what he has to say.

Q: This is your first time facing a general election as Prime Minister and leader of the Barisan Nasional. What are your feelings?

A: I am in high spirits because I am doing something which I have never done before. Besides that, my friends in the Barisan leadership are ready to help and give their full co-operation for the coming elections.

Every day, when I read the newspapers, I see reports and comments - from community leaders and political leaders - which are very encouraging because some of them say Barisan's victory is going to be big.

All these things give me the confidence to lead the party into the elections.

Q: What are the factors contributing to this confidence?

A: I feel confident in facing this great task and challenge because I believe the Government and party are with the people.

They have shown genuine support for me.

My views that have been published in the newspapers have been well received, and when I go down to the ground, I can see a good response.

Besides that, the party's preparations have given me strength and confidence.

I know that the Barisan leadership and the people are with me and this really boosts my confidence.

On top of that, the current good economic situation also gives me confidence.

Thankfully, since I became Prime Minister, the economy has been improving, and not declining.

Q: If the people once again give the Barisan a huge mandate, what will you do to give meaning to this mandate?

A: Whatever I have promised before this - things which have been very well received by the people - I will certainly fulfil. I did not make those statements just for the elections.

In fact, I believe I can carry out those promises because I don't think it is impossible.

God willing, I will be able to implement what I have said.

However, there is a lot more than just what I have said. The list is not finished.

The agenda is, in fact, very



long and what I have already talked about was only said during my first 100 days as Prime Minister.

Q: Can you explain why it is important for a government to have a big mandate?

A: A big mandate gives strength and confidence to a government.

With a big mandate, I will be able to carry out what I have promised as I know the people are with me.

A big mandate is also important for me to fulfil my future role and responsibility as chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement.

It is also important when I go overseas or give speeches. People will see me as a strong leader who speaks with the strong backing of the people. I will not be seen as a person who is standing alone when giving views.

A big mandate will give us strength in international relations, whether it is in the area of security or the economy. I will not be regarded as a leader who is without standing.

Q: The younger generation and professionals may feel that a number of opposition candidates should be in Parliament to ensure checks and balances. What would you say to them?

A: This is how I will put it. There are benefits to checks and balances.

However, a government must have a strong two-thirds majority.

Only then will it be able to carry out its role.

If the government is not strong, there will be a lot of politicking in Parliament. That will not be good for the people and the country.

Sure, we have to create all kinds of mechanisms to bring the people close to the Government in all areas.

We have all kinds of committees and we have held many dialogues with the people.

All this gives the Government much opportunity to hear all types of thoughts and views that will not be limited only to Parliament or the state assemblies.

When I go to the ground, I

also bring along my officers. Implementation and Co-ordination Unit (ICU) director-general Datuk Seri Dr Zainul Ariff Hussain always follows me on my visits to listen to community leaders. They all move with me.

On the way back, I will ask them:

"What are the people's complaints? What are their problems? What do they see?"

There is a lot of understanding between the ICU, government officers and me.

I have asked them to tell the people that I want to know what is really happening.

I want the people to tell the truth.

Q: In this election, you are seen as a pull, a force that will bring the people to the Barisan. Besides the various points you have listed, your image is also a factor. How do you see this as a selling point?

A: This is not something I asked for. I did not plan for my work to make me a selling point.

Because people see the changes I have proposed as something they can accept, I must therefore be in the new government to be formed after this.

If the people want me, it is because I have started all this.

As such, I pledge to implement all that I have said.

This will be one of the essential things to be included in our manifesto, which will be unveiled soon.

Q: Perhaps your image has created an expectation for candidates who are as similar to you as possible?

A: I will work hard to get good candidates.

There will be some old faces, as not all old faces are necessarily not good.

We cannot say that whatever is old is not good and everything that is new is good. We can't make such an assumption.

Q: But can we say that you are a benchmark when it comes to choosing candidates?

A: Please don't say that I am the benchmark. I want the best and I hope the people in Umno and Barisan will accept whatever decisions are made.