

# Pak Lah on the way ahead

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## Speech reveals thoughts and commitment on niggling issues and clear plans

DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi looked solemn, even a little tense, as he walked to the rostrum, the script of his speech in his right hand.

The Umno president has travelled a long and bumpy road since he last stood before the party faithful at the Umno general assembly.

His first speech as party chief in 2004 was more a celebratory occasion and was met with rapturous applause. His second speech saw him draw out his ideas and plans for the Malays and Umno.

Now, in his third year, he knows the honeymoon is over and he is at the crossroads of his mandate as Prime Minister.

As such, his speech — 28-pages of it and 120 minutes to read — was truly comprehensive, a sort of state-of-the-nation address by a party leader and Prime Minister.

"It was refreshingly free of rhetoric. Most of the time we get high-sounding and fierce rhetoric but this was a sober speech," said Ranau division head Datuk Masidi Manjun.



COMMENT

By JOCELINE TAN

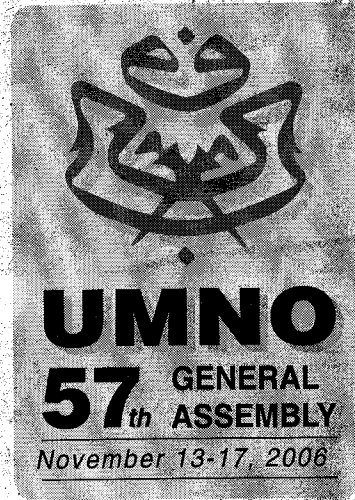
"He told us that this is what I think is wrong or right and this is what I intend to do."

Pak Lah addressed the issues facing his administration, elaborated on his ideas for the nation and reported on the progress he had made so far.

And there is no shortage of issues — the economy and foreign investments, cost of living, the public service and the delivery system, corruption, Islam Hadhari, race relations, and religious tolerance.

More importantly, he reiterated the aspirations that had won so many to his side when he took charge in 2004.

Contrary to public opinion, Abdullah is still committed to fighting corruption and money politics.



He has not deviated from his belief of a democratic and accountable government, pointing to the open debate in Parliament, which he described as a "symbol of democracy," and articulating his commitment towards a freer but responsible media.

He has been hit left, right and cen-

tre by his predecessor Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the last few months but yesterday, he did not hit back.

Rather, Abdullah used the occasion to explain some of the issues raised against him, chief of which was that he was not fully in charge.

Having stated that he is not a one-term Prime Minister in his customary interview with *Mingguan Malaysia*, Abdullah told the packed hall that he views political leadership as the prime mover of other leadership styles.

In other words, he believes in a consultative style, grounded in honesty, diligence and dedication for he sees himself as "God's humble servant."

His speech also showed he had both feet firmly on the ground. He was not living in an ivory tower and was acutely aware of misgivings regarding his administration not only from within the party but outside too. Malaysians who aspire to a more democratic society will be pleased

about his commitment to the social contract between the races and a tolerant Islam.

Abdullah, whom non-Muslims had viewed as a model moderate Muslim leader, would not hesitate to come down hard on those who hijacked Islam to breed intolerance and hatred.

He could have easily played to the gallery on aspects of race and religion, given the ongoing dispute over the composition of Malay equity but he stood on stage yesterday not only as the leader of a Malay political party but the leader of all Malaysians.

"There was a lot of sincerity. He is trying to tell us he is still the same man he was, he is trying to live up to public expectations and he is going to give it his all," said Pontian division vice-head Dr Khairul Azmi Mohamed.

There is no doubt that Abdullah is committed to his aspirations and plans and he will need all the help and commitment he can get to see them to fruition.