

Pak Lah focuses on economy

IT IS ALSO A CONCILIATORY AND 'RALLY TO MY BANNER'

SPEECH BY UMNO CHIEF

The Sun - 16/11/2006

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday delivered a conciliatory and "rally to my banner" speech at the Umno general assembly aimed at uniting the nation and harnessing national efforts towards a new paradigm in national development.

It was an attempt to salve the pain and hurt that had arisen over the open debate on such issues as the position of Islam and the New Economic Policy and the bruised feelings as a result of the public row between him and his former boss, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Because much of the 90-minute speech focused on the economy - FDI, economic transformation, R & D, the role of the private sector to

brought it up - but without naming names - by alluding to the fact that people cannot have similar thoughts, hearts and emotions.

He said: "The same logic applies to administering and managing a country. Different approaches will be adopted to suit different eras. We should, therefore, not fight each other because of different styles and approaches."

Abdullah, in an apparent reference to the differences in foreign policy with his predecessor, said he will not allow the country's sovereignty to be compromised.

He added that "we will not allow Malaysia to be exposed to a situation where we can be compromised or where legal action can be taken against us."

"Every decision we make is made to protect our national interests and

approval when he called on members to pray for Mahathir, who was admitted to the National Heart Institute on Nov 9, to have a speedy recovery and that for Tun Dr Siti Hasmah, who was present at the assembly, and members of her family to be strong.

And when he said "the government will ensure that all necessary facilities are provided in the treatment of this statesman", shouts of "*hidup Pak Lah*" rang out in the Dewan Merdeka.

On the NEP, Abdullah said the study that concluded that 45% of equity in companies is bumiputra owned is incorrect and that questioning the methodology used by the Economic Planning Unit is the same as accusing the government of lying.

"It is evident that the 20 years

generate growth – many delegates at the assembly commented it sounded more like a budget presentation.

“We must look at sectors that can still generate wealth for many Malaysians, especially those in rural areas, like agriculture and industries with high value, like financial services,” said Abdullah, when delivering his third presidential policy address since taking over from Mahathir.

The speech, considering where it was presented, was surprisingly less political and was more of an assessment of his administration and how it is still guided by the 12 pillars he adopted when took over prime ministership to guide him in his efforts to build a new and prosperous Malaysia and fulfilling the objectives of Vision 2020.

Abdullah talked of development of human capital; via quality holistic education programmes to equip Malaysians to face the globalised world; supported by the establishment of a creative and innovative society that will become a component of a population that possesses a first class culture.

But the man who has been described as “forever smiling” could not allow the rift between him and Mahathir to go unnoted and he

the question of whether we are brave or afraid does not arise. Every action has a consequence. We will not proceed with a decision if the outcome means compromising our national interests.

“We choose the best road to reach our destination. The priority is to achieve our objectives and if by softly whispering we can achieve what we want, then what reason is there for us to roar?”

He also said God created man with many imperfections and to better himself, man needs to be advised and to accept criticism but the advice and criticisms should be constructive and rational and offered with honesty and sincerity.

Abdullah also spoke at length on transforming the economy using sustainable methods, adding that the first step was to reduce the deficit. However, he pointed out that the country could continue to spend more than it earn.

“It is true that Petronas has money, but we must be disciplined and differentiate between Petronas’ money and government’s money and if we start dipping our hands everywhere, we are violating trust and mismanaging funds.”

But he pleased the delegates who gave a thunderous applause of

allocated to achieve the objectives of the NEP was too short a period; an unrealistic timeframe to successfully restructure society and eradicate poverty,” he said. Abdullah also dwelt on the recent public debate on the NEP and the increased but worrying polemics on issues related to race and religion, saying it was due to the more open environment which he described as a new phenomenon for Malaysia.

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He said while there are those who are adapting to it, there are those who want to test the limits of this openness and those who take extreme views, inviting equal reaction and objection from others. But he advised them to be guided by the social contract that was agreed to by the various races when making their stand.

“This is a learning process for us and at the same time, it is equally imperative that we maintain

stability until society finds its equilibrium,” he said.

Abdullah said he is encouraging this openness as he would like to see more debates and evaluation of the government’s performance by the backbenchers, the opposition MPs, the public and the media.

“The truth is that I would rather see heated exchanges in the pages of the press than to see raging riots on the streets,” he said, adding that responsible media will be a partner in translating the national vision and will contribute to maturity of the democratic process. Media practitioners must remember that they, too, have a responsibility and accountability in ensuring national development and national unity.

“Freedom must be shaped in the context of a young nation that is made up of many religions, races, cultures and languages,” he said.

On the perception that he is slowing down in his fight against corruption, he said he was doing his best but it was difficult without the support and help of the people.

Once again he appealed to the people to “help me to fight corruption by providing evidence”.

He also said Umno members must show exemplary behaviour by adopting and practising a culture of

respect for and abiding by the law.

When talking about Islam Hadhari, he called on Muslims not to sink into conservatism as demonstrated by the new intolerance that discourages Muslims from greeting others on the occasion of their celebrations and attending the Deepavali or Christmas open houses.

He would not hesitate to take action against those who try to hijack Islam in order to breed intolerance and hatred, saying that Malaysia is a country of cooperation and dialogue and not where people incite each other based on bogus allegations and fictitious threats.

Abdullah concluded his speech by calling on members to remember and pray for the souls of past leaders including those of Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Dr Ismail and Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba.

He said in recognition of Ghafar’s services, the government has decided to create a permanent chair in his name at his alma mater, the Sultan Idris University of Education.

For full text of speech log on: www.pmo.gov.my