The first keynote address of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the UMNO general assembly

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Abstract

The interest of this paper is the discourse generated by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in his keynote address as party president at the 55th UMNO General Assembly, 2004. The nation stood back in anticipation as he took over as Malaysia’s fifth prime minister and party president from his predecessor, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who held power for 22 years. After almost a year in office, Abdullah has succeeded in emanating a 'feel good' social environment as reported in the media. This paper looks at the discourse mobilized to introduce a new concept, Islam Hadhari, by the new leadership. Its interest lies in the construction of discourse and ideology that manifests. The theoretical framework adopted is ideological discourse analysis as proposed by van Dijk (2004). Some comparison will also be made with the discourse produced by the previous UMNO president.

Introduction

The nation awaited in anticipation when Malaysia’s fifth Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, took over from his predecessor in October 2003. Political observers and the international media had a field day speculating and offering their own analysis on the shift in power. The mild mannered and gentle Abdullah took over from Dr. Mahathir Mohamad who had been at the helm for 22 years. The latter, with his stingy wit, had more often than not proved himself controversial among international observers.

CNN International, with headlines ‘Big shoes for Abdullah to fill’ (CNN, October 31, 2003), claims that political observers concede that Abdullah’s leadership will be a contrast to Mahathir’s. They expect him to be ‘steering away from the frequently controversial course charted by his predecessor’. While he is well-known as a political ‘Mr. Nice Guy’, the media reports that his supporters who know him better warn of a