

03/02/1999

Abdullah: I understand my new role as DPM

Rashid Yusof; Sarban Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said tonight he truly understands his new role as Deputy Prime Minister which he defines as "not more than to assist the Prime Minister and as the deputy".

Abdullah made it clear that there was only one "general".

"I have many tasks which I have to carry out well and I don't think beyond that," he said in a live interview aired over TV1 with New Straits Times Press group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin.

Abdullah was asked to comment on former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam's advice to him in an interview published in *Mingguan Malaysia*.

Musa said Abdullah must always bear in mind this was the administration of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Musa admitted his mistake in that he was associated with the 2M tag played up by the Press when he was Deputy Prime Minister from 1981 to 1986.

Kadir then asked Abdullah where he would go next, including whether he would be Prime Minister.

Abdullah said: "I will continue to serve and it is up to the party and the people."

Outlining his tasks, he said as Deputy Prime Minister, he needed the support of friends, especially those in the Government, without distinguishing whether they supported him or not.

"Our struggle in the party is important," he said. "That is why many are of the opinion I can unite party members."

Asked to comment on criticisms against Dr Mahathir, including that he was not willing to listen to other views, Abdullah said the weekly Cabinet meetings bore testimony that the Prime Minister was ever willing to listen.

Abdullah also rebutted the allegation that the Prime Minister was "drunk with power".

He cited a Cabinet meeting at the height of the constitutional crisis concerning the Rulers when Ministers started looking at each other after they saw the extent of powers the then Attorney-General had proposed for the Prime Minister.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir rejected the proposal after reading it. "There was a sigh of relief at the meeting ... he (Dr Mahathir) could have those kind of powers."

Asked why there was a different perception about the Prime Minister, Abdullah said: "Because he calls a spade a spade."

"Foreign ministers who had met Dr Mahathir had expressed their surprise, saying they found him different from his public image."

The hour-long interview focused on Abdullah the man, how he saw his recent appointment, his years outside the Cabinet after he sided with Team B in the 1987 party election.

It also touched on the role of the police, the independent commission of inquiry investigating the black eye incident involving Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and the Sabah election.

Asked about the three years and nine months when he was out of Government, Abdullah said he was a full-time politician, putting in more time as MP for Kepala Batas, and as a vice-president of Umno visiting the divisions.

On the work of the commission of inquiry, Abdullah said they would focus

on the black eye incident, and would recommend appropriate action against those responsible.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said the injury inflicted on Anwar while in police custody was a criminal offence, one which the Government was not taking lightly.

On the police, he said although there had been complaints, they had carried out their job well. "That's why we now enjoy peace and stability."

(END)