

# PM: Govt will reply to Dr M

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**PUTRAJAYA:** The Government, through the relevant ministries, will reply to former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's demand for answers on the four issues he raised, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

He said the answers would be given in detail.

"The answers can be put out but this has to be done by the relevant ministries, not by me," he said in a statement issued to Bernama by his assistant press secretary Wan Esuriyanti Wan Ahmad.

According to Wan Esuriyanti, Abdullah wanted to clarify a statement by Johor Baru MP Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad who was reported to have said that the MPs left it to Abdullah to implement the process of

explaining to the people regarding the criticisms.

Earlier, 78 Backbenchers Club (BBC) members, including Shahrir, and senators were given a briefing on the controversy by Abdullah at his office in the Internal Security Ministry yesterday.

Some backbenchers told *The Star* that various ministers and government officials had already replied comprehensively to Dr Mahathir's questions on the Government's decision to scrap the Johor bridge; on the sale of Proton's foreign venture and MV Agusta Motors SpA; on the issuance of approved permits for car imports; and on why Proton Holdings Bhd chief executive officer Tan Sri Tengku Mahaleel Tengku Ariff's contract was allowed to lapse.

However, since Dr Mahathir insisted that he was not satis-

fied with the answers, the relevant ministries would come forward with more details on the issues raised.

According to Shahrir who was present at the meeting, replies to questions raised by Dr Mahathir would be given "openly, clearly and fully so that if there are doubts among members of the public, these can be quashed."

"The answers will be made directly to the people. It will be open and not through any closed-door or four-eyed meeting between the two. Since Dr Mahathir's attacks were made in the open, the answers should also be made openly," said Shahrir.

It would take some time to prepare the replies, he added.

Last week, Dr Mahathir levelled his strongest criticism yet against Abdullah, accusing him of dismantling many of his poli-

cies and projects.

The former prime minister, however, maintained that he was not picking a fight with Abdullah or the Government, but merely wanted answers to questions on policies dropped by the current administration.

Pulai MP Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed hoped that once the Government has given its side of the story, Dr Mahathir would be satisfied and stop lambasting the Prime Minister and his administration.

Backbenchers Club acting chairman Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar said the Umno MPs and senators had sought the meeting with Abdullah, and they also gave him their word that they were fully behind him.

"We told the Prime Minister to carry on with what he has planned for the nation, and that

he could count on our 100% support," he said.

According to the MPs, the Prime Minister stressed that while industrialisation policies laid down by the previous administration would not be abandoned, the emphasis on agriculture was necessary because not everyone, especially the rural Malays, were "chasing the IT dream."

The Ninth Malaysia Plan remained his chief concern, Abdullah said, and the people should judge him and his Government on the success of the plan over the next five years.

Abdullah reminded them, said the MPs, that even when he was down and out, he had not betrayed Umno, spoken on a PAS platform, or "even for a second, joined Semangat 46."

This remark was not lost on

some of the more senior MPs, who recalled that Dr Mahathir had spoken on a PAS platform when he was expelled from Umno in 1969.

The MPs emerged from the meeting generally satisfied with his explanations.

"I feel good, Datuk Shahrir felt good, and I think even the PM felt good about the meeting," said Ketereh MP Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad.

Bera MP Datuk Ismail Sabri said the meeting was meant to send out the signal that Umno MPs were unanimously behind the Prime Minister.

"We want to show our solidarity on this issue. Whatever the outcome, we are with him," said Ismail.

Nur Jazlan found Abdullah focused and calm, despite the pressure on him.

"But we don't want this issue prolonged," he said.