

Shahrir: Govt doesn't have to answer Dr M

JOHOR BARU: The present Government does not owe any explanation to any of its predecessors for its decisions or actions, Johor Baru MP Datuk Shahrir Samad said.

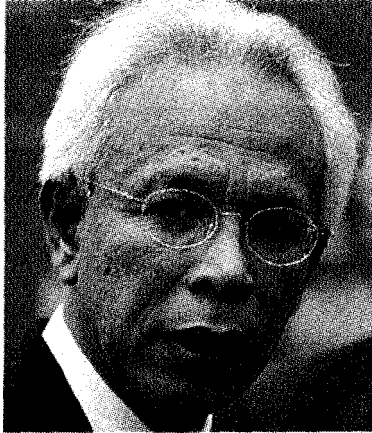
"Why does the current administration have to answer to Dr Mahathir? There is no such precedent," the former Backbenchers Club chairman said.

He was commenting on former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's singling out of four issues for which he wanted explanations from the current administration.

They are the Government's decision to scrap the bridge to replace the Johor-Singapore Causeway, sale of MV Agusta, the issuing of approved permits to import cars and the non-renewal of former Proton Holding chief executive officer Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff's contract.

Shahrir said Dr Mahathir could insist on getting an explanation. "However, he has rejected all explanations given to him," he said.

He added that the people had endorsed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during the



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general election of 2004.

"I believe the best defence to any criticism is your performance," he said, adding that the coming general election which has to be held by 2008 would show if the people agreed with the decisions made by Abdullah.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein believed

explanations had already been given for some of the issues such as on the bridge to replace the Causeway and Proton.

"Now, it is up to the wisdom, resilience and patience of the Prime Minister and the ministers involved on how they want to handle the matter," he said.

When asked whether he thought it was a good idea for the two leaders to meet, Hishammuddin, who is also Education Minister, said:

"I respect both leaders. I am not in any position to ask or tell them what to do but I know both of them do not have any personal problems with each other," he said.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the matter should not be blown out of proportion to avoid any misunderstanding.

Syed Hamid, who is also Foreign Minister, said it was important to deal with the issues in such a way so as not to let others perceive that Malaysia was having an internal conflict.

"This matter can be solved rationally

and I am confident that Pak Lah's way is the right way being non-confrontational," he said.

Syed Hamid stressed that every decision made by the Government had the backing and agreement of all Cabinet members.

Meanwhile, Perlis Umno Liaison Committee has urged Umno leaders not to make any statements or take action that could affect the party following Dr Mahathir's criticism of Abdullah.

Its chairman Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said both leaders were respected by party members and their different views should not be seen as a big crisis in the party.

On his plans to become the middleman for both leaders to solve matters, Shahidan, who is also Perlis Menteri Besar, said he was still trying his level best to do so.

"I realise that I am a 'dwarf in this issue but this is our effort," he said.

Sabah Wanita Umno expressed its undivided support for Abdullah whom it described as a moderate but firm leader.