

Dr M hopes for a heart-to-heart with PM

LANGKAWI: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is ready to sit down with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and unload his grievances.

He hopes the meeting can take place before Hari Raya.

"At the meeting, I will raise again the issues that I've been keeping in my heart since I left the government," he said.

The former prime minister "was responding to a suggestion by Mubarak, the council of former elected representatives.

"Mubarak suggested that I meet the PM over a breaking of fast before Hari Raya and tell him what's in my heart, and I am willing to do that."

When it was pointed out to him that it was less than a week to Hari Raya, he said he was waiting for the green light from Abdullah.

"I don't know when. Hopefully, it is before Hari Raya.

"However, it is up to the PM's convenience as I understand that he is a busy man."

This move by Dr Mahathir comes as a surprise as he has repeatedly attacked Abdullah and his policies — and even said that he was the second choice for the country's top job. He hit the replay button during an interview with Bloomberg.

Over the past few months, Dr Mahathir has criticised Ab-

dullah for cancelling the half-bridge project to Singapore, and for reversing some of his policies.

On his part, Abdullah has refrained from getting into a slanging match which could divide Umno and the country.

There has been growing pressure from the ground for them to meet and work out their differences behind closed doors. Umno politicians are also concerned over the fallout from a continuing feud. Against this backdrop, it will be difficult for Abdullah to turn down an offer to share a meal and discuss any issue with Dr Mahathir.

But Abdullah has said repeatedly that he wants to do what is right for the country, and will consider the views of the Cabinet before major decisions are taken.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir met a group of seven Thai Muslim leaders from south Thailand. He said there was a possibility of a lasting peace for the people in the deep south based on Malaysia's own experience.

"If people are well-treated and have a good life, they wouldn't want to be involved with strife. Malaysia faced problems then but after taking steps, we've enjoyed peace over the past 40 years."

The biggest stumbling block to a peace plan could well be

whether the Thai government was willing to talk to the rebels, Dr Mahathir said.

"I think they are at a stage where they want to talk, so they need a response from the government, but the actual terms — that will have to be negotiated by them."

Dr Mahathir said he was

willing to continue in the role of negotiator. "If people want me to play a role, I'm quite prepared but I'm not pushing myself."

He added that the attitude of the new Thai government was a lot more reconciliatory than that of Thaksin's administration.