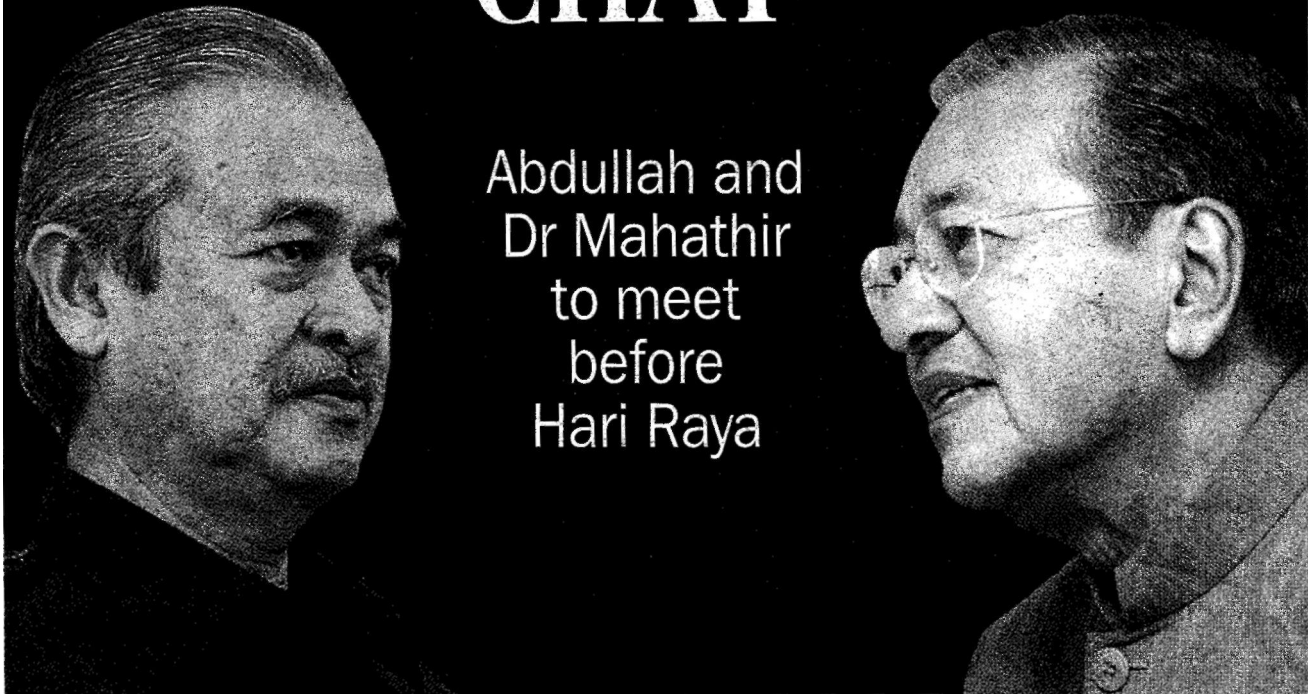


HEART-TO-HEART CHAT

Abdullah and
Dr Mahathir
to meet
before
Hari Raya



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PUTRAJAYA: The Prime Minister will have a one-on-one meeting with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the next couple of days.

There will be no mediators and no conditions during the session.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi confirmed this at a Press conference after discussions with new Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont yesterday — a day after Dr Mahathir had said he was prepared to sit down with his successor and unload his grievances.

"I am prepared to meet Tun. No conditions, no mediator, just me and him only," Abdullah responded when asked by

reporters whether he was ready to meet with Dr Mahathir.

"I am ever ready to meet him."

Pressed further, he said the meeting would be held before Hari Raya Aidilfitri which was expected to fall on Tuesday.

Abdullah said that the idea of the meeting was broached by Mubarak, council of the former elected representatives.

"After Mubarak met Tun at a breaking of fast function, they talked to Tun about this.

"They met me and told me that it would be good if Tun and I meet up and that Tun himself had agreed to see me. I answered that I was also prepared to see him

"That was my answer and before I went to Mecca, I suggested a date but he wanted it

postponed."

On the venue of the meeting, he said in jest, "the day when we meet, that will be the venue" (of the meeting.)

Abdullah also said there was no need for a mediator. "There is no need for a third party."

He said he would not bring up any issues with Dr Mahathir when asked whether he would highlight anything during the meeting.

The Prime Minister, who is also Umno president, said he hoped the meeting would bring good not only to him and Tun but also everybody.

He also expressed hope that the meeting would end all misunderstandings.

It is believed that the meeting was initiated by Mubarak, the council of former elected

representatives.

One of those in Mubarak who is believed to have played a key role in mediation efforts is Tan Sri Azahari Taib.

Contacted last night, he said efforts to get both parties to meet had been going on for several weeks.

Over the past few months, Dr Mahathir has criticised Abdullah for cancelling the half-bridge to Singapore, and for reversing some of his policies.

On his part, Abdullah has refrained from washing dirty linen in public, concerned over its impact on Umno and the country.

There has been growing pressure from the ground for both men to have a heart-to-heart talk and settle their differences behind closed doors.