

Ceasefire hopes dashed, Dr M renews attack

KUALA LUMPUR: Hopes of a ceasefire between Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Prime Minister after Sunday's peace talks lay in tatters after the former prime minister upped the ante.

He accused Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of turning the country into a police state, called into question his integrity and added more embroidery to past allegations.

This latest attack came barely 24 hours after Dr Mahathir's two-hour meeting at Seri Perdana and damaged hopes of a reconciliation during the holy month of Ramadan which Malaysians had hoped for.

If anything, it showed that the former prime minister was bent on continuing his campaign against Abdullah and his administration.

His comments yesterday suggest that a ceasefire will only be possible if Abdullah jettisons what he is doing and adopts policies and ideas from Dr Mahathir's play-book.

"I will continue until there is some change, until I achieve some results," he said.

During his meeting with Abdullah, he spoke on a range of issues—charges of nepotism against the PM, concerns on his management of the economy, the Approved Permits scheme, the fate of Proton and the lack of opportunity for him to speak at Umno functions.

Asked whether he had received

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Dr Mahathir

a good hearing from the PM, Dr Mahathir said what he knew was that Abdullah had listened.

"He wrote in his notebook. You see, he may have written something else, but as far as I can see, he had something in his notes." Speaking at a Press conference at his home in Seri Kembangan yesterday, Dr Mahathir said his legacy was not being eroded as a result of the controversy.

"It is being chipped away by the actions of this government," he said.

He also dismissed allegations that his attacks were harming Umno, pointing his finger instead at Abdullah.

"It's not just about divisions

within Umno, it's public support for Umno which is being eroded."

"Umno cannot win elections without public support and today the public is very critical of the present conditions of the present economy, the present system of administration, the involvement of his family members."

He also suggested that Abdullah may be personally corrupt, citing a letter the latter wrote for a relative's company that obtained contracts in the UN's oil-for-food programme in Iraq.

At the time, Abdullah was deputy prime minister.

Abdullah has acknowledged having written the letter but said

he did not benefit from the deal.

A United Nations inquiry last year cleared him but Dr Mahathir yesterday was bent on revisiting the issue.

Asked if he was accusing Abdullah of corruption, Dr Mahathir said: "As far as I am concerned, it is wrong that a serving deputy prime minister should get his name listed among the companies which did oil-for-food trade with Iraq."

"You should not write letters of recommendation for your own relatives."

Asked on his assessment of Abdullah's personal integrity and honesty, he shrugged and said: "I don't know."

He said Abdullah had changed from the time when he was deputy prime minister.

"When he was DPM, his children and son-in-law were not involved."

"He agreed to everything that was decided by the Cabinet and he was a very good deputy."

"But people change when they have power," he said.

When asked whether he was unhappy with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak for not being vocal enough, Dr Mahathir said whatever Najib did would affect his future.

"I did lobby for him, but beyond that I am not prepared to go and do anything more," he said.

He also said he would not rule out the chance of meeting Abdullah again, but added that if it remained a dialogue with just both of them, the effect would be lost.

He claimed the government was preventing him from airing his views and said police have pressured people who invited him to speak at public gatherings.

"The habit of asking police to frighten people should be stopped."

"I consider this a police state. I also consider my civil rights have been taken away."

It remains unclear if Abdullah will respond to this latest outburst from the former prime minister.

But he must have been stung by the ferocity of the attack, coming barely 24 hours after he welcomed him to the official residence.

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