

Mahathir issues an open letter

KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has levelled fresh criticism against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, through an open letter sent to the media yesterday.

The two-page letter - titled *Why did I criticise the Prime Minister?* - was addressed to "Citizens of Malaysia."

"In a situation where no one can criticise the Prime Minister, I have to voice my criticisms on matters that do not concern my personal being, but only those that concern the interest of the religion, race and country," he said.

In his letter, which he signed off as a "Malaysian citizen and commoner," Dr Mahathir listed four manners in which he had allegedly been blocked from criticising Abdullah.

He claimed that Umno, non-government organisations, associations of government officers or non-government officers, universities or other institutions were not allowed to invite him to their functions.

He also said: "Every time anything that involves the public takes place, the Deputy Prime Minister and certain other quarters will forcefully advise that any criticism, comment or debate should stop."

Claiming there was a climate of fear in the country, Dr Mahathir said the questions and issues he had raised had not been answered, and that what was being questioned was his right to comment and criticise.

He said attempts were made to disparage him "so badly that I am made out to be of unsound mind. Repeatedly, allegations were made that the administration during my time was worse."

The former prime minister, who led the country for 22 years, said the media also made out his criticisms as despicable and reprehensive.

"My meeting with him (Abdullah) should be kept secret from the rakyat. And because we have met, I can no longer criticise Whatever is done by the Prime Minister," he said.

In ending his letter, Dr Mahathir said he was forced to release a written statement so that it was not spun by anyone as all avenues for criticising the Government had been closed to him