

# PM: Detractors abusing freedom to attack me

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**BANGKOK:** The Prime Minister's willingness to allow democratic debate in the media has opened the doors to allegations of nepotism against him.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said his detractors had used the new space to comment and criticise to try and topple him by eroding his credibility.

"I think the accusation of nepotism against a leader is one way of bringing him down, of eroding his credibility. They will do anything," he said in an interview with *Bangkok Post* editor-in-chief Pichai Chuensuksawadi at his residence in Putrajaya.

Asked about allegations of nepotism against his son, Kamaluddin, and son-in-law Khairy Jamaluddin, he said he was very sad that his leadership style of allowing more debate had opened him to criticism.

He said Kamaluddin had worked overseas and got contracts with Petronas through open international tenders.

His son had also bought companies which he wanted because of their engineering and machine-tooling capabilities.

"He does not build the company organically. He goes for mergers

and acquisitions. That's his style of business. Although many people have come and asked him to go into joint ventures with government-linked companies, he says 'No, I have enough money, I am rich'", he added.

Abdullah said he was also sad that Khairy had suffered losses as a result of having to sell his interest in investment banking group, ECM Libra.

"That's something about which I am very sad. He sold it (ECM Libra shares) at a loss. Now he has some debts to settle," said Abdullah.

He said that when the offer to join ECM Libra came to Khairy, all sorts of news emerged about him to discredit him.

Abdullah said freedom to speak should not be used to tell lies and slander other people, adding that he was open to criticism.

"You want to speak the truth, by all means, I have no problem. You want to tell me something's wrong somewhere, tell me. Tell the leadership the truth. I am happy for people to help me see things that are not doing well," he added.

Abdullah also reiterated that

he had not stopped his drive against corruption which was part of his reform agenda when he took over the administration.

Abdullah said the government had added 300 new officers to a special investigative unit that would not wait for police to provide a report before it acts.

"If they themselves receive reports or if they believe something is not right somewhere, they will go in," he added.

Asked about ongoing investigations into corruption, Abdullah said there were more than 100 cases now.

He added that he had told the officers to be fair and have enough evidence.

"To an executive, to the owner of a company, they know that if these officials walk into their room, their ratings go down. Immediately, people will suspect that something is wrong," he said.

But Abdullah said it was not easy to get evidence as suspects were very clever and they had money all over the place, such as Swiss banks where it was very difficult to get information.

As a long-term measure, Abdullah said he was working on

prevention by inculcating good values and integrity through the setting up of the Institute of Integrity Malaysia.

On development of the country, Abdullah said he had reason to be happy with his achievements since becoming the prime minister three years ago.

But he wanted to do more to narrow the lopsidedness in development in both human and physical infrastructure.

"Well, taking into consideration the time factor, also the problems that I have faced and the deficit that I had to reduce, what I have achieved today in the third year as prime minister, I have reason to be happy," he said.

Abdullah said it was not an easy passage for him as he had tabled the Ninth Malaysia Plan and the National Mission on March 31, 2006, and that the lower and upper houses had only endorsed the plan in May.

"It took time to plan the Ninth Plan. It is not something I could think of off the top of my head. I had to think very, very hard.

"This plan must be able to take us to Vision 2020, especially the National Mission. I must aim for 2020."