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PM fires back at Dr M, Ku Li and Anwar

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi went on the offensive against his critics yesterday, signalling he would fight back to keep Umno and the government together.

Speaking after a special presidential briefing to Umno members, the prime minister and Umno president acknowledged that while his predecessor had influence, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had misused it to the disadvantage of Umno.

"In 2004, when we won, he said we were too powerful and this was not proper and that we should have some opposition.

"When the opposition gained ground, we thought he was going to celebrate but instead he hit out at us," Abdullah said.

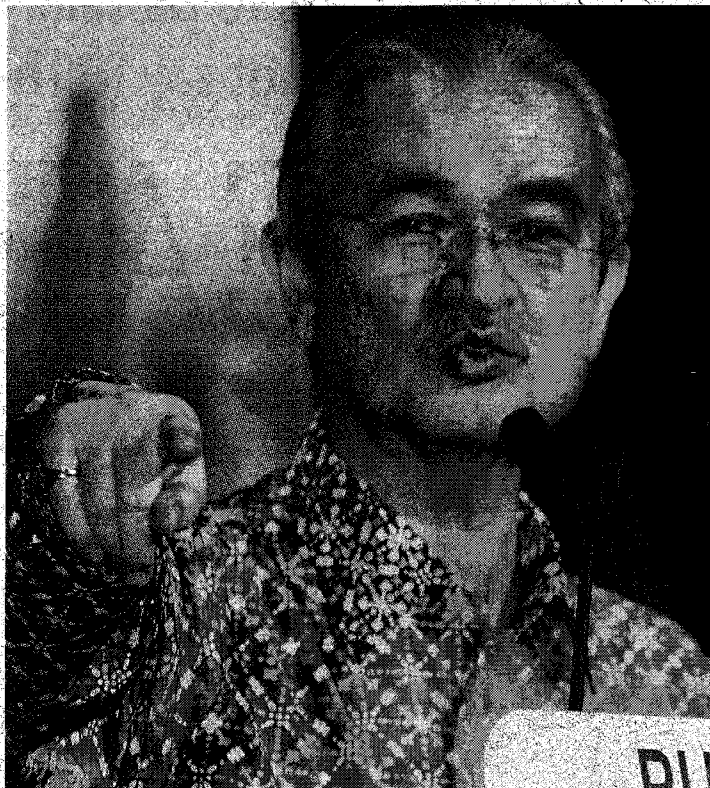
"We can't win big and we can't win little. So what can we do?" he said when asked whether continued criticism by Dr Mahathir would damage the party.

Dr Mahathir has been saying that Umno was in fear of Abdullah, to which he riposted: "In my time there is no freedom but it is also said that I am soft. Are they afraid of this softie?"

Asked whether his replies meant a change in his stance towards Dr Mahathir, the usually reticent Abdullah said: "I have to say what needs to be said.

"If there is no need to say anything, then I would not say it. There is no other intention."

He also asked why Dr Mahathir was questioning his handling of the mainstream press when the former premier himself had a tight grip on the media.



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi speaking to some 1,000 Umno members at the special presidential briefing yesterday.

"I know that editors were called when Dr Mahathir took over as prime minister. They were told not to write nor carry pictures of Tun Hussein Onn," he said.

Dr Mahathir had also been responsible for "Operasi Lallang", a crackdown which saw the detention of 106 people under the Internal Security Act.

Asked whether he would call for an investigation into Dr Mahathir on his past actions, Abdullah said that would be left to the government agencies.

"If the matter needs to be investigated then it will be done."

On Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who is making a bid to challenge him for the party presidency, Abdullah said the Kelantan Umno leader should look at himself for an explanation of why Kelantan remained in Pas hands.

"Ku Li needs to look at himself. He was the reason (in 1990, through Semangat 46) why we (Barisan Nasional) lost and Kelantan fell to Pas," he said.

He also asked whether Tengku

Razaleigh had made any effort to help restore the Barisan Nasional as the state government.

Abdullah said he was informed that the Gua Musang MP did not assist the Kelantan BN in the 12th general election.

On the claims that 30 BN elected representatives were looking at defecting to the opposition, Abdullah said such an act would be despicable.

"They do not realise and recognise that the seat won was due to the rakyat. They do not care about the rakyat. What they want is power. All they are interested in is their leader becoming the prime minister.

"This is a form of corruption," said Abdullah.

He said Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who had claimed to be actively persuading BN MPs to cross over to the opposition, was impatient to become prime minister.

"He considers himself the leader-in-waiting. Let him wait. I am the prime minister now."

On the move to reform the judiciary, Abdullah stressed that its troubles did not originate from his administration.

"Confidence, including from business circles, in our judiciary is low," he said.

Abdullah said the corporate sector preferred to refer contractual disputes to countries other than Malaysia.

"They do not have confidence (in the Malaysian judiciary). This is bad," he said.

Abdullah said the government had to do something about the negative views of the judiciary.

"The people have high hopes that the judiciary will be reformed."