

Reports by SHAHANA AZ HABIB, ZULKIFLI ABD RAHMAN and IZATUN SHAARI

# Abdullah hits out at his critics

Prime Minister strikes back at Mahathir, Razaleigh and Anwar

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has struck back by hitting out at Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for their criticism of his leadership.

Stressing that he was not a *lembik* (soft) Prime Minister, Abdullah said there were many things that were not right in the previous Prime Minister's reign, citing the 1987 *Operasi Lalang* crackdown, the erosion of confidence in the judiciary and lack of freedom in the media as examples.

He also said Umno was deregistered under Dr Mahathir's leadership (in 1988) "but we never asked him to step down".

"There is no stopping his slew of accusations. He claims there is no freedom of media. Does he not remember that during his time, he asked the media to 'block out' stories and photos of (former Prime Minister) Tun Hussein Onn and not give coverage to certain people?"

"As for *Operasi Lalang*, don't forget who's responsible," he said, in reference to the 1987 crackdown in which over 100 people were arrested under the Internal Security Act for purportedly causing racial tension and posing a threat to national security.

On the judiciary, Abdullah said the problems did not start during his era.

"Many countries do not have confidence in our judiciary. And when there are differences between our countries, they do not want to refer the matter to a Malaysian court.

"They would rather take it to a court in Singapore, Hong Kong or Australia so I thought I had to do something about it to restore confidence because the people are hoping for reforms in the judiciary," he said, in response to people being upset over what had been disclosed about the state of the judiciary during the Royal Commission of Inquiry hear-



**Senior leaders:** Former Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Tajol Rosli Ghazali (left) and former Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh in a thoughtful moment before the briefing by Abdullah at PWTC yesterday.

ing on the Lingam videoclip.

Abdullah, who is the Umno president, was speaking to reporters after giving a briefing to Umno grassroots leaders at Putra World Trade Centre yesterday over the party's performance in the general election.

He also denied accusations that he listened to son-in-law, Khairy Jamaluddin, instead of his Cabinet and Umno supreme council members in making decisions.

"It is as if my Cabinet members are all stupid and only Khairy is the intelligent one!" he said, brushing aside claims that he was surrounded

by yes-men.

He also lashed out at Dr Mahathir for saying that Barisan Nasional had too strong a victory in the 2004 general election and that there should be a stronger opposition in power, adding that the former leader had in fact helped the opposition win more seats.

To a question, he said such remarks could destroy Umno as the former leader still had strength.

"But strength can be misused," he added.

He hoped Dr Mahathir would lay off criticism and "give us a chance to

do what is best for the party and the Government".

On Razaleigh's recent open criticism of his leadership, Abdullah said the Gua Musang MP should "*cermin diri*" (take a good look at himself).

"He was the reason Barisan lost Kelantan to PAS in the first place," he said, adding that the Kelantan leader had done nothing to win the state back.

Following the 1987 Team A vs Team B fight in Umno when Razaleigh took on Dr Mahathir for the party presidency and lost and the subsequent deregistration of the

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DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

party, Razaleigh went on to form Parti Melayu Semangat 46.

In the 1990 general election, Semangat 46 joined forces with PAS and managed to wrest Kelantan from Barisan.

And since then, Barisan has not been able to win it back. Razaleigh in the meantime disbanded Semangat and rejoined Umno.

On former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who was sacked from the party in 1998 and was trying to make a political comeback, Abdullah said he (Anwar) saw himself as "the leader-in-waiting".

"He can wait but I'm the leader today!" he stressed.

He also pointed out that when Anwar was the country's number two he (Anwar) too tried to control the media in terms of what came out on TV and in print.

"Although he was the deputy prime minister, he was already acting as the alternative leader to Dr Mahathir," he said.

Calling on all members to close ranks, Abdullah said working together was the most important thing.

"I cannot accept an Umno that is quarrelling among itself at this point of time as the agenda for the people should be implemented as soon as possible," he said.