

Razaleigh: Dr M has right to criticise

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah yesterday defended Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's right to criticise Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership.

The former finance minister, once the former prime minister's main political opponent after losing to him in a bitter contest for the Umno presidency, said Dr Mahathir had a right to speak his mind.

He said Dr Mahathir had indicated his unhappiness over the way things were being done at a meeting with him a few months ago.

Tengku Razaleigh said Tun Mahathir expressed dissatisfaction with matters like the AP issue which had threatened Proton, and the trade agreement with Japan which he felt would not benefit the nation.

"We spoke generally as one does when meeting an old friend. He is a man concerned about many things. He is the man who started Proton. He feels strongly about it.

"Rightly or wrongly, he has a right to air his views. Tun Mahathir is someone who never minces his words. If he has something to say, he says it," said Razaleigh, who left Umno to form Semangat 46.

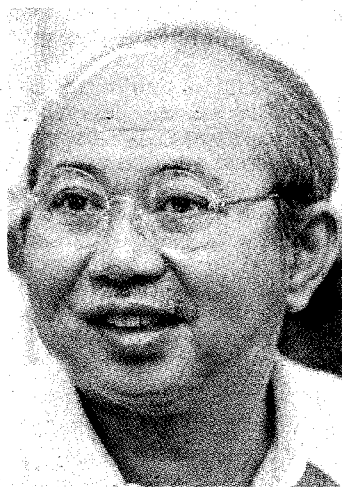
The Gua Musang MP, who felt the rift between the two leaders should be settled as soon as possible, said Dr Mahathir was speaking "because of something that made him unhappy".

"But, I'm sure Abdullah has his reasons (for pursuing certain policies)," he said during an interview at his residence.

He said Dr Mahathir had strong feelings about certain matters and should be allowed to air them as a citizen, but "somebody should broker a meeting between the two to settle the matter".

Tengku Razaleigh was, however, surprised that Dr Mahathir had chosen to publicly air his dissatisfaction with Abdullah.

On the implications of Dr Mahathir's outburst, Tengku Raza-



Razaleigh says rift must be solved

leigh said a rift between the leaders could lead to problems in Umno.

"Any rift will have an effect on the party and nation. Whether you like it or not, Dr Mahathir has been on the scene for more than 20 years, and has many supporters.

"Why are we fighting among ourselves? We must try to avoid (a confrontation) and resolve it so that we can move forward."

Tengku Razaleigh added that this was especially important as the country had just embarked on the Ninth Malaysia Plan and would face numerous economic challenges.

He said business circle's were not very happy with the current economic situation.

"The mandate won by the Barisan Nasional in the 2004 general election made people optimistic about the future. Many statements were made by the leadership and expectations were high.

"But now, they think the economy is not moving forward. They are hoping things will improve. They had experienced a buoyant and vibrant economy before (during Dr Mahathir's time). But this has not recurred," he said.

Tengku Razaleigh said everyone needed to co-operate as many things needed to be done to kick-start the 9MP.