

Cabinet: Attack on PM is an attack on us all

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KUALA LUMPUR: Some of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's strongest language last week may have been directed at Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, but the Cabinet considers it an attack on all ministers.

Several ministers who spoke to the *New Straits Times* after their weekly meeting yesterday said they were not only troubled by the personal nature of the attack against the Prime Minister but viewed the substance of what Dr Mahathir said as an attack on the integrity of the Cabinet.

Last Wednesday, the former prime minister accused Abdullah of backstabbing him and implied that Abdullah had been the sec-

ond choice to succeed him.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the decision to abort plans to build a bridge to replace the Causeway, to sell MV Agusta for one euro, and to slow down the construction of Putrajaya.

As all decisions by the Government are sanctioned by the Cabinet and made collectively, the ministers felt that an attack on the PM was also an attack on them all.

After a lengthy discussion, they decided that relevant ministers would reply to queries raised by Dr Mahathir.

However, there was no time-frame for them to do so.

The consensus was that the public was entitled to know the truth.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysians could expect "nothing but the truth" from the Government.

"There have been attempts to portray the Government as trying to hide things from the people, implying that the Government has not explained the reasons for its decisions, when it clearly has.

"The Government will not have people being continuously misled," said Syed Hamid.

He said that while the relevant ministries would answer all the questions raised, he did not expect everyone to find the answers palatable.

"The Government is open," he said. "The most important thing is

if you want this information then you must be ready to accept the Government's explanation.

"We realise that it is anyone's right to say what they like... we don't expect all our decisions to be popular or readily accepted.

"Once we have done the explaining, that's it. We will not have this matter prolonged. End of story."

Meanwhile, when met by reporters after an evening dialogue on human security held at Hotel Hilton PJ last night, Dr Mahathir said he would wait for the Government's answers.

"Well, we will wait," he said when asked about the Government's plan to reply to points he has raised.