

Abdullah disappointed with Dr M's venom

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■ **By Sharanjit Singh**
sharari@nst.com.my

KEPALA BATAS: The prime minister had a plan when he met Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad behind closed doors on Sunday.

He wanted to give his chief critic maximum opportunity to raise all the issues that was bothering him over these past months. And even when the former prime minister said things that were untrue during the two-hour meeting at Seri Perdana, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi held his tongue.

"My attitude from the start was to give him the chance to talk about the issues he was not happy about. I kept to my plan, Tun took one-and-a-half hours.

"We agreed to meet for two hours. So, only half an hour was left for me," said Abdullah, explaining why he spoke sparingly during the meeting at Seri Perdana.

Dr Mahathir said that he was not happy with Abdullah's responses and expanded his six-month campaign against the PM on Monday, calling Malaysia a police state and questioning Abdullah's integrity.

Abdullah was disappointed that his predecessor has chosen this route. He had hoped that Dr Mahathir would have waited for his explanation but the latter had started making statements before he could respond.

"He has met me and said everything that he wanted to tell me. I have to take time to respond.

"However, he has repeated (the attacks) again... this time with stronger doses of venom... what to do, God only knows. It looks like he is intent on continuing what he has been doing all this while."

Abdullah was speaking to

the Press after his Hari Raya open house. He was in a jovial mood, no doubt heartened by the strong support from the public and politicians here yesterday.

On the open rebuke by the Sultan of Johor to Dr Mahathir, Abdullah said the statement made by the Sultan was actually reflective of many people's views.

It was reported that Sultan Iskandar al-Marhum Sultan Ismail had said that Dr Mahathir should behave like a pensioner and stop "making noise".

He also called on the people to join him in supporting Abdullah's administration.

Abdullah yesterday revealed for the first time what had happened during his

meeting with Dr Mahathir on Sunday.

Abdullah said some of the issues raised by his predecessor were not true, especially Dr Mahathir's claim that Malaysia had become a police state.

"There is no basis for such an allegation. I have no intention to turn this into a police state.

"We are a country where the rule of law is always upheld. We have a democratic system where laws are enacted in Parliament," he said, adding the government did not curtail the people's freedom.

Abdullah said people who did not break the law should have no reason to fear the police.

He said Dr Mahathir had

made several other claims which were untrue, including one that Umno members were being prevented from speaking up.

"He said Umno members were now afraid to speak up and were all 'yesmen'.

"I told him that it is not true... Umno members themselves have said they are relieved as they are given space to talk and air their views."

On a claim by Dr Mahathir that there had been no projects implemented in two years, Abdullah said it was an inaccurate claim.

He said projects under the Ninth Malaysia Plan had just entered the seventh month and some were being implemented.

"He (Dr Mahathir) says it has been two years but the ninth plan has just entered the seventh month.

"The projects are being implemented... The people will see the results by the middle of 2007," he said, adding many Class F contractors were already carrying out minor projects.

Abdullah also touched on allegations that he failed to respond to attacks against his administration and let his ministers handle issues on his behalf.

"I am merely following Dr Mahathir's advice that the ministers concerned should be allowed to talk."

On allegations that Scmi Bhd was awarded a project to transport coal although the company did not have ships to do so, Abdullah said the company had actually acquired another company which owned 180 ships.

He said Dr Mahathir's children had also received contracts but it was not highlighted. "The projects awarded to Dr Mahathir's children were far bigger than what Scmi received."