

Go ahead and criticise me, says Abdullah

NST- 28/10/2006

■ **By Jason Gerald John
and Cynthia Lee**
news@nst.com.my

MALACCA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has never been free of criticism.

The prime minister has been criticised in Cabinet meetings, the Umno supreme council and Barisan Nasional meetings.

This was because they sometimes held views that differed from the prime minister's.

But Abdullah said yesterday that such differences of opinion were resolved through consensus.

"We discuss and express our views before reaching an agreement.

"When a decision is made, it's a collective decision. That makes it easier for us to implement... This is my way," he said at the state Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house at the Melaka International Trade Centre in Ayer Keroh yesterday.

"If anyone wants to criticise me, go ahead," he said in commenting on a statement yesterday by former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad that he was criticising Abdullah as no one else was able to do so.

Dr Mahathir had claimed that Cabinet members and others holding government and party posts were not allowed to criticise Abdullah.

He had also alleged that the media was muzzled in the matter while the Internet and websites were bugged to enable action to be taken against those who criticised the prime minister.

On his two-hour meeting with his predecessor on Sunday, he said he had maintained silence during the first 1½ hour as he wanted to give Dr Mahathir a chance to express his feelings on the administration of the government and his leadership.

"I wanted to reply but I didn't want to interrupt because eventually he would say that I'm wrong. So I waited for him to stop talking before commenting one by one on the issues ranging from the police state, Umno, family interference and the economy and finally on the crooked bridge.

"I was satisfied that Tun had expressed himself. However, I am slightly disappointed as I had many things to say and to reply to what Tun had expressed but I had to stop because of the limited time."

Abdullah also touched on the fifth annual

Reporters Without Borders worldwide Press freedom index, which indicated that the freedom of Press in Malaysia was better compared with several Asean countries, including Singapore and Thailand.

"This is the view of outsiders who are constantly assessing us in terms of competitiveness, quality, human rights and Press freedom."

It was reported in the media yesterday, that Malaysia ranked 92 in a poll carried out in 158 countries on Press freedom. Malaysia was ranked 113th last year.

Earlier, Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said the country, its leaders and people were happy that Dr Mahathir and Abdullah had met to resolve various issues but unhappy with the outcome.

"We were all hoping that things would have been different with Tun during this auspicious month. Our hopes were high that he would have a change of heart and together we could work towards developing the nation.

"But it looks as if Tun has let us all down. We know how it feels like for Abdullah and we share his sentiments and promise to support him in his endeavours for the nation's good."