

'Bridge nothing to do with issue of integrity'

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Q: Another of your relationships which is getting a lot of Press at the moment is your relationship with Dr Mahathir Mohamad, your predecessor. Things look extremely testy at the moment. What's it all about?

A: Well he doesn't agree with some of the things that I'm doing. Some of it has to do with some of the projects that he decided that we should implement.

And that's all there is to it, nothing more. That's how it all started.

Q: Still though he was the Prime Minister for 22 years, he's still got a lot of people who respect him and hold him in the highest regard (Yes, that's true). Do you worry that by taking him on in this fashion that you might be committing political suicide?

A: No, no, no. I don't think it's political suicide. He has been saying a lot of things, I have decided to keep quiet and to go on doing what I want to do. And people want me to do what I want to do. And I still

It has become the standard question at every interview — how Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is reacting to criticisms by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. On CNN's *Talk Asia*, the Prime Minister answers a series of questions on what sparked the testy relationship and whether he is courting political suicide by disagreeing with his predecessor.

command majority support today.

Q: One of the things that he said against you is that you've turned Malaysia into a gutless nation. Not least because you've pulled out of this plan of the construction of a bridge linking Malaysia and Singapore.

Do you think he's got a fair point there when you know, he might see you as rolling back everything that he put into place?

A: No! Vision 2020, his biggest achievement, that's my target too.

That we share, I share the vision. I have developed what I call a national mission. The mission is very big, in order to achieve that vision.

My plan is not just for the Ninth Malaysia Plan, my plan is for the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the Tenth Malaysia Plan, for the Eleventh Malaysia Plan.

Q: But huge construction projects, like the bridge for example, you know, that was one of his babies, it was something that he worked for many years on. Now

he's seeing you ditch it.

A: We discussed in the Cabinet, we felt that no, we'll not do it. We're very practical about our approach, and the bridge has nothing to do with the life and death of Malaysia.

It has nothing to do with the issue of integrity, it's a very practical issue. And for that reason we feel that we won't have the bridge. We can do other things to develop Malaysia.

Q: If he had not been in power, if he hadn't ruled the country the way he did, would you accept that Malaysia might have been less of a success than it is today.

A: He was our prime minister, he was our leader, he was a leader for 22 years. He has achieved considerable success for Malaysia. We are proud of his achievement. That's a fact.

But today, when he begins his criticisms, not everybody appreciates it, not everybody.

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