

Pak Lah tells his side of the story

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Transcript of the press conference held by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at his Hari Raya open house in Dewan Milenium, Kepala Batas yesterday.

Q: Will you reply in detail to the issues raised by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad during your recent meeting with him?

A: I have to prepare answers for many issues that have been raised. Actually, during my meeting with him, I gave him the chance to express his dissatisfaction. That was what happened.

It went on for an hour and a half. There were occasions when I felt like debating with him, when I did not agree with what he had said. But, if I had done that, it would have taken time. Tun would not have been able to tell me everything. And that would have become an issue.

Tun wanted to speak to Pak Lah, so Pak Lah listened. But, my stand from the beginning was to allow him to talk. I abided by my intentions.

Tun took one-and-a-half hours. We had agreed to meet for two hours. So, that left only 30 minutes for me. Tun stopped on his own. I did not force him to stop talking. He paused for a while. I felt there was no more that he wanted to say, only then did I speak.

I will tell you what was raised. First, he said the country was a police state. That, I disagreed with.

Second, he spoke on Umno, saying that people were afraid of giving their views, that all had to listen to what I say, and that nobody was bold enough to fight or give their opinion.

I said that's all not true. All Umno members are happy under my leadership because they feel relieved that they can talk. This democracy has been created by Umno leaders themselves. That's what I said briefly.

Then he mentioned about me restricting him from going here and there. This is not true.

On the contrary, he might not be aware that when I was Umno vice-president but was not holding a Cabinet post, people who were trying to please him restricted my movements.

Maybe at his level, he did not restrict. I also have not restricted. But at that time, I was an elected vice-president and held a party post. If we go by that, I could have gone anywhere.

Nevertheless, despite the restriction on my movements, people still respected me and maybe Dr Mahathir did not know then that such a thing was being done to me by people who wanted to make him happy.

Tun also spoke about my son and son-in-law, that there were calls here and there. But when he said my son Kamal (Kamaluddin) did not have the facilities to undertake a project that was beyond his capacity, especially the coal contract, I said he had.

He said it (Scomi Group Bhd) has no ships. But, who says it has no ships? That's not right. The company has ships, 180 ships, ships that are owned by a company that it has taken over.

His son also had a contract. It's just that it was not revealed and the project his son got was bigger than the one Scomi got.

I did not say more than that to him. Other matters about projects that Kamal got, I did not touch on much.

There were no arguments or exchange of harsh words in the conversation. It was calm. But I was not able to talk

much. It was already two hours long. I did not say anything further.

Q: Will you give a detailed explanation later on?

A: I have explained. What is there to explain further. The list is very long. But most of it were issues that I had explained before. But he still insisted on telling them to me directly. So, I could not say much. I was not interested in arguing with him.

He wanted to convey what was on his mind and I gave him an opportunity to do so. Some of the other details I had explained in the past. So, I did not want to repeat them. Tun himself had said before that if the Prime Minister did not want to give explanations, he could ask the other ministers to do so on his behalf. So, I took his advice and allowed other ministers to give the necessary explanations. But, when he said that I could not answer him, that was not nice.

Q: People were expecting an amicable solution to this issue but it seems that Tun has gone in the open to attack you. What are your comments?

A: I felt sad because people who came to my Hari Raya open house were still talking about the matter. I felt disappointed and sad. Many directly asked me about it.

I had hoped he could have waited till I had given him my explanations. I felt sad about it because he had told me all that he had wanted to say. I needed time to respond. But, he repeated (the attacks) again with stronger doses of venom. What more can I do? *Allahualam*, he still wants to continue.

Q: What are your views on the Sultan of Johor's statement that Dr Mahathir should behave like a pensioner and stop making noise?

A: The Sultan's comment reflects the people's opinion. Many people have said so. When people greet me, they urge me to carry on. They say I still have time. They say I should not feel disappointed. We support you, Pak Lah. We know you are new. The 9th Malaysia Plan is still new. Tun said it has been two years, but it is only seven months old. He said it has been two years. It is incorrect.

Q: What have you to say about the two Cabinet ministers who went to Tun's Hari Raya open house?

A: It is all right. It's to establish friendship, which reflects the Hari Raya spirit. It is common. So, it is not right to say

that we should not go.

If you do not want to go, it is another matter altogether. But if we want to prohibit, then that's not right. If you want to go, go ahead.

Q: Your comments on the postponement of the Umno elections?

A: The decision was clear. Let there be an option. The option is for me to decide.

Q: Will there be a second meeting?

A: We will see. Everything is possible, and everything is also impossible.

Q: When do you plan to give further explanations?

A: Let us find a better way to explain.

Q: Do you see an end to these attacks?

A: I do not know. He is the one. To me, I fully understand the promises in my manifesto to the people. I also understand the 9th Malaysia Plan. A lot of projects have begun.

It all takes time for the results to materialise. I am confident that what (projects and programmes) have been started will be clearer to the people before the middle of 2007. The projects are good, for the benefit of people from various groups.

Nowadays, there are many Class F contractors. They are given a chance to carry out small projects, according to allocation. In terms of big contracts, there are not many but they have started. (Works Minister Datuk Seri S.) Samy Vellu had expedited the technical drawings. If things had not been done, tenders could not have been called quickly.

We, in the Cabinet have decided that if JKR (Public Works Department) is unable to carry out a project, we will let other contractors help out. There are many other possible methods. Interested parties should submit their proposals. We will select the best in terms of quality and pricing.

I have explained many times that the private finance initiatives (PFI) is one of the ways that the Government is using. Not all are build, lease and transfer (BLT).

For example, the monorail project in Penang. It will be better if it's a PFI project. Let a private company build it and do its planning and costing. It will see the project's feasibility and viability, whether it can be carried out or not, whether it is profitable or not. It all depends on the company that's proposing it.

After that, it will know how to manage the monorail. If it charges fares that are too high, people will not use it. Only after a few years will it be able to determine its profits.

The company that builds the monorail in Penang can finance, build and run the monorail system and can manage it forever. Why should the Government involve itself in such a big project when it can use the funds for other deserving projects? The monorail will be the private company's. It will know how to run it and determine the fares.

If we give to a concessionaire for 30 years, and the Government takes over later, the company will not be able to determine its profits within the short concession period. Under PFI, when the company makes profits, the Government can collect taxes from it.

I wish to clarify a little about the issue of Malaysia as a police state. Malaysia is not a police state. There is not a single appropriate reason to suggest this.

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PM against police state

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I do not have the intention of turning Malaysia into a police state. We are governed by a democratic government that is fair and equal. Our laws uphold our sovereignty according to the Constitution. It's a country that brings development to the people, who wish to live in harmony.

We hold steadfast to the sovereignty of our laws. So if people abide by the law, they need not feel threatened. Our country is free to table laws in Parliament. The present Parliament meets according to schedule. This institution is recognised and democratic.

Whatever laws that are applied have been passed by Parliament. We do have the police, but not a private police. Our police are ruled by a government that is chosen by the *rakyat*.