

Pak Lah: I'm still the commander

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he was still the commander who carried out the mandate given to him.

"I still command majority support today and people want me to do what I want to do," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during an interview with CNN Talk Asia which was broadcast yesterday.

"I have developed what I call a national mission, which is very big, in order to achieve that vision," he said.

Abdullah said he believed there were other things the Government could do to develop the country.

On Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew's statement that the Chinese in Malaysia are systematically marginalised, he said: "It is groundless. The Chinese in Malaysia are doing well. They are better off than the indigenous people, than the Malays.

"They have been so successful because we give them opportunities to be successful.

"We allow their people and their children to go to Chinese and vocational schools to learn Mandarin."

On the freedom of press in this democratic country, Abdullah said: "It is not tightly controlled. The Malaysian press have freedom but they are a very responsible press who understand the situation in which they operate.

"The main press self-censor, but there are other little ones printing all sorts of things and saying all sorts of

things."

Abdullah also said he read about and heard of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's criticisms of him and would make adjustments he needed to make if any criticism was relevant but he could not accept all of them.

Agreeing that a lot of people still respect Tun Dr Mahathir and hold him in the highest regard, Abdullah, however, said he did not think he was committing political suicide when taking on his predecessor.

"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," he said.

He said his tense relationship with Dr Mahathir started when the latter did not agree with some of the things that he was doing.

"Some of it has to do with some of the projects that he decided that he should or we should implement. And that's all to it, nothing more. That's how it all started," he said.

Abdullah also denied that he was rolling back what Dr Mahathir had put into place as he still shared the same vision with his predecessor, which was the Vision 2020.

"Vision 2020, his biggest achievement, that's my target too!"

On whether he accepts that Malaysia might have been less of a success than it is today if Dr Mahathir had not ruled the country the way he did, Abdullah said: "We wouldn't know, we wouldn't know, we wouldn't know."

"This is a theoretical question. He was our Prime Minister and our leader for 22 years. He has achieved considerable success for Malaysia. We are proud of his achievement.

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

He also stressed that the Cabinet had taken a very practical approach to scrap the scenic bridge project and that it had nothing to do with life and death of Malaysia.