



PHOTO: AP

Mahathir strikes again

The former premier wants action, not just words from the government

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MALAYSIA'S former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad yesterday made it clear that his battle with the government for a satisfactory response to his criticisms has just begun, and that he will pursue the matter to the very end.

At a two-hour dialogue held at a private club here, he said he was not satisfied with the replies so far.

He indicated he will not leave the government in peace as long as it did not "right what is wrong" in the cancellation of the bridge project to replace the Causeway and the policies regarding national carmaker Proton.

Using the Malay phrase "*sampai lubang cacing*", which loosely translates as pursuing something to the very end, he said it was not just explanations that he sought, but action.

"What good is it of raising something and then going to sleep?" he asked.

Tun Dr Mahathir has been locked in a bitter battle with his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi over government policies which he sees as attempts to demolish his legacy, such as the national car.

And he has clearly been seething over the outpouring of support from Cabinet ministers and Umno leaders for Datuk Seri Abdullah.

Speaking to more than 500 people at the dialogue, which included top leaders from the

opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia, he mocked his former Cabinet colleagues as a "chorus line" who danced in unison to support their current boss.

"Every little thing, they say 'we support, we support'. Like a chorus line when they dance, it is all the same. One kicks a leg, the rest will kick. Like the Rockettes."

"When they dance, it is better than the military," he added to laughter from the packed hall.

He warned Datuk Seri Abdullah that such support was of "no quality" as he, too, once commanded similar support from those who kissed his hands and praised him.

He also took issue with Datuk Seri Abdullah's silence to his criticism, saying that "we have a Prime Minister who does not say anything".

He said when he appointed him as his successor, he did not impose a condition that Datuk Seri Abdullah should not hand over his power to his children or their spouses.

"So I do not know who is in power in this country. Because he does not answer, he is only quiet. Others will answer," he said.

He accused Datuk Seri Abdullah of breaking promises, including the bridge project and ensuring that certain investments would continue.

"He knows, and I know," he said, adding that the first promise, which he did not specify, was broken less than two weeks after he stepped down. "Very quick, very decisive".

Tun Dr Mahathir said he was not satisfied with the government's replies to his criticisms and still wants answers to:

► Why the proposed bridge to replace the Causeway was scrapped. He insisted that Malaysia had every right to build a half bridge in its own territory without having to secure Singapore's agreement.

► Why Proton sold Italian motorcycle manufacturer MV Agusta for 1 euro to an unknown company Gevi SPA. He claimed it was an investment company set up a year ago just to buy MV Agusta.

► Why Trade Minister Rafidah Aziz had given out so many approved permits (APs) to two individuals who were not in the car business to import cars. One of them was said to be a former ministry official.

The dialogue was organised by Malaysia Today, a news website associated closely with his old nemesis Anwar Ibrahim.

Tun Dr Mahathir spoke for an hour before answering questions for another hour, during which not even Datuk Seri Abdullah's initiatives such as Islam Hadhari, the Ninth Malaysia Plan and National Automotive Policy, were spared.

"I am a believer in the real Islam, I am a fundamentalist...we follow one Islam, there is no need for an Islam Hadhari," he said, referring to the Prime Minister's moderate Islam campaign.

Tun Dr Mahathir's decision to speak at this forum surprised many and prompted speculation that it might push Umno to take action against him.

Asked later at a press conference about rumours that the party wanted to sack him, he said it had the power to do so.

"They want to sack me, sack me," he said.

So far, there has been no response from Datuk Seri Abdullah or his ministers.

► On Singapore

"For 22 years, I have tried, but trying to be friendly with Singapore, it is not possible. They won't be friendly with us, they think of themselves only.

I give you an example, Seameo (South-east Asian Ministers of Education Organisation). In a meeting in the Philippines, we suggested increasing the budget. Singapore was asked to contribute an additional US\$10,000 (S\$16,000) a year. It no longer wanted to be a member. Just because of US\$10,000, it is willing to break ties. They are calculative, even one cent they count."

"These people (Malaysian politicians) like to play golf, every little thing, they want to go to Singapore to play golf, the children, son-in-law. It's a concrete jungle, nothing there, but they like it. I rarely go to Singapore, since I retired, not even once."

► On former deputy prime minister Musa Hitam's remarks that he was suffering from "post-prime ministerial syndrome"

"He thinks we are like him, he's the one with the syndrome. That's why I had to give him jobs, send him to the United Nations, give him various posts."

► On talk that Umno wants to sack him

"They want to sack me, sack me. Those who have the power to sack me can do so. I've been sacked before."

► On party loyalty and support

"Before, I also got such support, many kissed my hands, but now I know this support has no quality. I thought they supported me because of what I was doing for the country...Now, I know they supported me because I was the PM."

► On PM Abdullah's promises to him

"What is decided together is also a promise. We discussed together and decided together, including the bridge. That was a promise, but cancelled."

► On the possibility of meeting PM Abdullah for a chat

"We can sit down, but chat, I do not know. It must not be just a social event."