

An afternoon with Tun Mahathir Mohamad

■ By Zulkifli Othman

THE sun bounced off all that glass and silver on Twin No 2 of the Petronas Towers, directly into our eyes. The backlight hides the man sitting behind the modest desk in silhouette, but there is no mistaking the profile of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The prominent nose that has been captured so many times in Lat cartoons is as sharp as ever.

For a moment we were silent: Mahathir easily appraising his visitors from behind the shadows, us squinting in the full spotlight of the afternoon Kuala Lumpur sun.

This lumination overkill is coming through through the office's floor-to-ceiling windows, which also gave us a grand view of of the city complete with its twisting roads, now beginning to choke with the going-home crowd.

We were in Tun's 86th floor office in Tower One. The space had all the trappings of a chief executive office, the cool sheen of the steel furniture co-ordinating well with the gleaming trusses of the tower outside.

This is an office of a man still very much in touch with the world, and despite having retired from public office for nearly four years, is still very much appreciated internationally – he is being nominated for the Nobel Peace prize this year.

We were there to talk about an upcoming conference being organised by the Perdana Global Peace Organisation, which he chairs.

But the inevitable happened and we gravitated towards his very public tiff with his handpicked successor, the present Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The tiff became very public last year when Mahathir spoke up after the Government aborted a bridge project that would have demolished the present causeway and allowed water to flow again in the Tebrau Straits.

The cancellation angered Mahathir who also criticised Abdullah for the way the Government dealt with the issuing of import permits for cars and the sale of Proton's stake in motorcycle-maker MV Agusta for 1 Euro to an unknown Italian company Gevi Spa. This was after Proton had spent 1 million Euros on Agusta.

Since those heady days, Mahathir has not been getting the column inches which he has been accustomed to when he was Prime Minister. He told us he was tired of explaining himself because his explanations don't get published. Even now, he says, I don't think you are going to print this.

Mahathir leaned forward, eyed us with the look he has honed after more than 22 years as Prime Minister and made a noise with his throat. It was a signal to start asking the obvious questions. ▶▶▶



FORWARD: Tun, your outspokenness against certain things about the administration of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has not been presented as well as you liked in the mainstream media.

Many people are still unsure about your motives, can you explain why the bridge issue is so important?

TUN MAHATHIR: When I criticised the Government and the Prime Minister for dropping the Malaysia/Singapore bridge, I felt very disappointed that many thought that it was just an excuse to voice my personal unhappiness with Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Few regarded the Government decision as being against the interest and sovereignty of Malaysia and that my criticism was because of the Prime Minister's failure to uphold Malaysia's integrity and honour. Because these people believed that there is a personal difference between me and the PM, not only did they disregard the issue but believed that the two of us should just make up and everything would be fine again.

What, they say, is so important about the bridge that I should continue to con-

demn the PM and his Government. The causeway had been there all these years and would continue to serve us just as well. Maybe the people of Johor would be unhappy for whatever reason but the people in the rest of the country should not be concerned over this "local" issue.

FORWARD: Why has this not come across in the various articles published about the bridge issue?

TUN : It is very difficult for me to explain that this is not a personal issue, nor is it a local issue involving only the people of Johor. Building the bridge is a national issue. Submitting to Singapore is a matter that denigrates our national sovereignty, national honour. There were and still are very real reasons for wanting a bridge to replace the causeway. In the first place the traffic congestion at the Johor Bahru end of the causeway had become impossible to manage. And the congestion could only get worse as the number of vehicles increase in the coming years.

The Second Link had not been able to relieve the traffic in Johor Bahru.

An elevated road would stop the congestion. But such a road cannot possibly connect with the JB end of the causeway. It has to land far from it. Part of the causeway from the JB end to where the highway lands would become useless. It would be silly to keep and maintain it. It must be removed anyway.

The best solution would be to replace the whole causeway with a bridge. Then the water in the Selat Tebrau (Tebrau Straits) could flow through. This would help flush the polluted water into the open sea. In addition barges, small ships and mega yachts could pass through making the straits a useful waterway.

There would be a lot of opportunities for business, for tourism which would benefit Singapore as much as Johor.

But a bridge replacing the whole causeway would require the co-operation of Singapore. We informed Singapore and asked them to build their half of the bridge.

But as expected Singapore was not cooperative. The excuse given was frivolous

Mahathir nominated for Nobel Prize

FOUR non-governmental organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina have nominated Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

They are the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, the Congress of Bosnik Intellectuals and two Christian organisations – the Serb Civic Council from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croat National Council.

The move to nominate the former Prime Minister was spearheaded by Dr Ejup Ganic, who was Vice-President of Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1990-96 and President of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina until March 2001.

Dr Ganic, currently the Chancellor of the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, worked closely with Dr Mahathir in the 1990s when Malaysia provided economic, political and humanitarian support to a Bosnia-Herzegovina recovering from the trauma of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the 1992-95 civil war.

Nominations to the Norwegian Nobel Committee closed on Feb 1 and this year's list includes former US Vice-President Al Gore, Finnish peace broker Martti Ahtisaari and Chinese dissident Rebiya Kadeer.

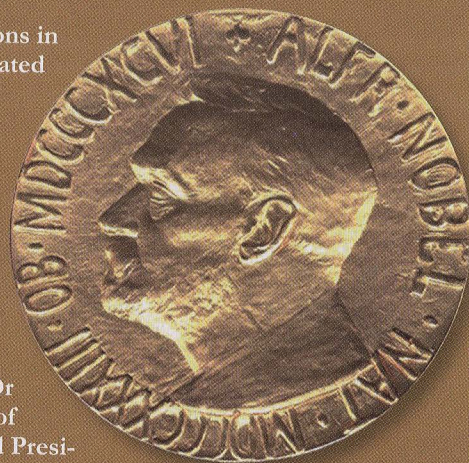
In a nomination paper signed by Dr Ganic made available to The Star in February, Dr Mahathir is described as the Third World's "most illustrious contemporary" and its "most courageous advocate."

Dr Ganic said that Dr Mahathir had influenced the world by leaving behind lessons on how diversity could be managed, conflicts reconciled and multi ethnicity harnessed to build a vibrant economic and political system.

He also highlighted Dr Mahathir's "Prosper Thy Neighbour" policy, his enlightened vision of Islam and his work as an ambassador of peace in Iraq-Iran, Bosnia-Herzegovina, southern Thailand, Philippines and Aceh.

Dr Mahathir, 81, who retired from public office in 2003, launched the Kuala Lumpur Initiative to Criminalise War in December 2005 and chairs the Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO) that was set up to implement the initiative.

PGPO's "Expose War Crimes: Criminalise War" Conference and Exhibition was held at the Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur last month.



even when Malaysia builds a bridge in its territory.

When you accept foreign authority over your own territory you are surrendering your sovereign right, your independence actually. Any Malaysian with a bit of national feeling would feel this is wrong. Why struggle for independence if we are going to surrender it so easily and to Singapore at that. What kind of a Prime Minister is this who "kowtows" even before pressure is applied!

FORWARD: Tun, there are some who

would say you have gone back on your promise not to interfere with your successor.

TUN: I had promised not to interfere with the Government of my successor. Immediately after Datuk Seri Abdullah took over, he did many things which were not right.

Firstly he allowed members of his family to meddle in Government administration. The Ministers, the Menteri Besar and senior officials know this is true even though they are unwilling to confirm this.

Goh Chok Tong had some nostalgia about the causeway. Since when has nostalgia of one person determined national policy.

I know that if we wait for Singapore we would never build the bridge. We had never been able to solve any problems with Singapore because as things are Singapore benefits at Malaysia's expense.

I decided that we should build a bridge on our side, within our territorial waters. The Singapore part of the causeway would not be touched at all. The bridge would land on our part of the causeway.

I informed PM Goh and in a letter which Singapore had made public PM Goh said he preferred a straight bridge but if Malaysia wishes to build a bridge only on its side of the Straits he would accept. He did not object nor did he impose any condition. He could not because we would be doing something within our sovereign rights.

Work accordingly started on the new Customs, Immigration and Quarantine Complex and an environmental impact study and soil investigation for the bridge were carried out.

Test piling for the bridge had begun when the PM stopped work because he wanted to renegotiate for a straight bridge with Singapore. I could have said that he was not going to have any more success than I did, but people would just think I was afraid Abdullah's style might succeed where my style had failed.

Two years passed. When a project is delayed the cost would go up. Malaysia lost money. Encouraging sounds were made by the PM, the Deputy PM and the Deputy Works Minister. Malaysia would build the bridge on our side whatever may be the stand of Singapore.

Then in April 2006, the PM announced that no bridge would be built at all, because: Malaysians refuse to sell sand to Singapore, Malaysians refused to allow Singapore air force planes to fly over southern Johor and Malaysians did not want the bridge.

Even if the demands made by Singapore for sand and airspace are because they would be wrong. But PM Abdullah seem to consider Singapore has an absolute right to demand for sand and overflying rights

Privately they have said so.

Secondly projects which were approved by the previous Government of which he was a member and Deputy Prime Minister, and projects he had undertaken to approve were cancelled by him ostensibly because the Government had no money. This cannot be true because I made sure the Government's financial position was good when I stepped down. There was loose talk that I used up all Government funds and there was no more money for anything. Malaysia is far from being bankrupt. Its credit rating is high.

FORWARD: Tun, how different is it for you from when you were PM and now?

TUN: When I was considering stepping down I expected to continue my friendship with my colleagues in the Cabinet and in Umno. I thought that off and on we would meet socially and enjoy talking over the past, about episodes when I was

nese New Year party that he wanted to see me. I went to his residence. It was not like a meeting between friends and long term colleagues. It had an official atmosphere.

FORWARD: Why were you called?

TUN: I was asked whether I wanted my sons to be candidates in the coming elections, in particular whether I wanted Mukhriz to take over my old constituency. I said no. I did not explain why but I did not want anyone to think that I was trying to create a dynasty. My son will have to fight his own battles. He can expect no patronage from me. It is something the Prime Minister does not understand. He does not seem to think that nepotism is despicable.

After that meeting I did write to suggest that (former Kedah Menteri Besar) Datuk Seri Syed Razak should be allowed to contest as I believed he would win back the seats lost to PAS. This was because Dato Seri Abdullah had hinted during

and he did not ask for my opinion. *Hidung tak mancung.*

For the 9th Malaysia Plan he saw me with Dato Seri Najib Razak and Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop. I was asked my views and I did express my disappointment over the slowdown of the construction of Putrajaya.

There were occasions when I attended functions where the PM was also present. As for Najib, he saw me several times in the early days of my retirement. But a long time has passed since I met him face to face.

FORWARD: What has been the cost to you, Tun, over your outspokenness?

TUN: I felt that I was more and more persona non-grata especially after my criticism of the dropping of the Singapore bridge project.

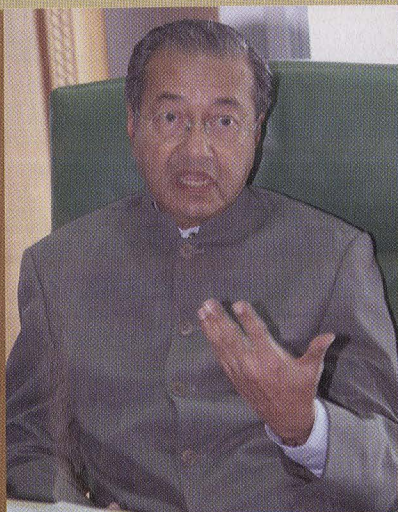
Instead of the easy relations with my former Cabinet colleagues which I had envisaged, I began to hear criticisms and even abuses directed at me, particularly regarding what the supporters of the Government called "Mega" projects. During my time everyone rejected the term "Mega" but the present Government did not refute the implied extravagance of my Government over the mega projects.

FORWARD: Why were these projects essential?

TUN: Among the so-called mega project that were stopped was the double-tracking of Malayan Railways from Johor Bahru to Padang Besar. Malaysia imports and exports 10 million containers a year. Many of these containers have to be moved about the country. Trucks can only carry one container at a time. Already they are clogging the highways and the streets. There will be more in the future. The car carriers also clog the roads.

Trains can pull as many as 50 containers and 100 cars at a time. They will reduce the number of container trucks and car carriers on the road. With no level crossings trains will move faster. Double tracking will eliminate the need for trains to stop for other trains to pass.

In other words double-tracking the rail system is a necessity now and will be even more so in the future. The cost would go



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together with them in the Government and in the party. I even thought that some of them would ask for my opinion and perhaps my help in solving problems.

Very quickly after stepping down I realised that I was being avoided, one or two saw me but mainly to talk about personal non-Governmental problems. The rest I never saw at all, not even on social occasion. I was made to feel that I was almost a member of the opposition.

It seemed as if anyone who came near me was regarded with suspicion. Once I was told by the Prime Minister at a Chi-

our conversation that he wanted to find a new Menteri Besar for Kedah. Syed Razak did well in the election. But he, like other Menteris Besar, never saw me at all after I stepped down. So much for "*Budi yang baik*".

FORWARD: Was there any other time that you were consulted for your vast experience in leading the country?

TUN: I think that was the only time I gave my view to the PM. I met the PM on three other occasions when he requested to see me. Mostly he talked about what he was doing. I did not venture to comment

up if delayed. It would take six years to build and only slightly more than RM2 billion would be needed each year if construction had been started as scheduled.

It is like the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system in Kuala Lumpur. Imagine the number of cars and buses that would clog the streets if the LRT had not been built. The trains are already crowded now with passengers having to stand all the way. The effect of double tracking the railways would be the same as the LRT. It would relieve the highways from being jammed with container trucks and train passengers would reduce road traffic. The decision not to go ahead with the railway project is unwise. The Government has the money.

All the other projects described by the son-in-law of the PM as mega projects have all proven necessary and timely. What would Kuala Lumpur be like if there is no Putrajaya to take away more than 100,000 civil servants who must all travel by car or by bus to work. The relief to Kuala Lumpur would be more when Putrajaya is completed. How would the growth in airline passengers be catered to without the KL International Airport? Look at the KL Sentral station. It is crowded with travellers even on ordinary days. What would the Perhentian Bas Pudu be like without KL Sentral during Hari Raya etc.

Only the politically motivated would say the North South Highway and the other expressways are a waste.

These projects are necessary. They are not for show. They have all proven beneficial for the country. And they will be even more useful in the future. I will not comment on why we built the twin towers.

FORWARD: Is there fall-out from these cancellations that could affect Malaysia in the future?

TUN: As a result of the cuts in Government projects the economy has slowed down. Statistics in the New Straits Times may give a different picture but many contractors and businesses, especially those owned by Malays, have suffered. The big contractors had to look for jobs abroad. Many small and medium contractors have added up. But if you ask them, they will not admit this. They are scared.

FORWARD: How about the present government economic policies? It's



an about-turn to what you were trying to do.

TUN: Instead of moving into hi-tech industry, the Government switched to agriculture. Since agriculture cannot create as many jobs as industries, unemployment especially among graduates has increased. So far agriculture has not contributed towards increasing exports. But our food imports remain huge.

Despite not having much agricultural products for export a Free Trade Agreement was signed with Japan that gives access for Japanese cars and other manufactured goods to enter Malaysia freely in exchange for export of agricultural products to Japan. This will affect sales of Proton cars in the country while the balance of trade will favor Japan more.

The foreign policy change is also uncalled for. We had cultivated the friendship of African, Arab and Muslim countries. It had been very good for us. If anyone goes to these countries they would feel much welcome. Businessmen and even Petronas benefited much from the foreign policy.

Now we want to be close to Bush, Blair and Howard. These are discredited leaders who are derided as incompetent and liars even by their own people. Malaysia should not be seen to be close to them. But great efforts are made to meet Bush and lots of

publicity given. As a result our standing among many countries, especially Muslim countries has gone down. They don't think much of us now. On the other hand the big countries do not show they appreciate our friendship. Their attitude towards us and our views have not changed.

FORWARD: What about the present administration with Singapore? It seems that things are friendlier than when you were PM?

TUN: Malaysia's relation with Singapore had always been problematic. During my stint as PM I had tried to be friendly with Singapore but we gained nothing from it. Then I decided to be tough but I must admit I got nowhere either. All the problems involving water supply, Pulau Batu Putih, Central Provident Fund, railway service to Singapore and railway land etc remained unresolved because Singapore refused even reasonable demands like an increase in the price of raw water.

The Government of PM Datuk Seri Abdullah decided to be friendly with Singapore. Singapore has gained having acquired a Malaysian Bank. We have gained nothing.

Some say the friendliness has reduced tension between the countries. But it is Malaysia that has been willing to bow and scrape before Singapore's leaders. In the



Read between the lines

OBVIOUSLY fed-up with the way his frank views do not always get printed by Malaysian newspapers, Tun Mahathir has resorted to sarcasm when asked to comment anything about the present administration.

During a Press conference recently, he was steered to answering questions about developments in the country that included the government's new executive jet, the failed merger plan of two newspaper groups and the sharp rise of the Ringgit against the US dollar that could hurt Malaysian exporters.

His answers showed that although he has not spoken at public engagements against Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi since November last year, his unhappiness with the current administration remains deep.

Asked to comment on the government's lease of a jet that allegedly cost US\$50 million (RM200 million), Tun Mahathir said the government should have bought a bigger plane.

Bloggers and news portals had claimed that the Prime Minister is buy-

ing an Airbus A319 jet for his own use at a time when he is curbing public spending.

However, the Premier said that the jet is for the use of top officials, including the King.

He denied that the government is buying the plane, and said it would be leased from Penerbangan Malaysia Bhd (PMB), the parent company of national carrier Malaysia Airlines.

Datuk Seri Abdullah's explanation has been challenged by the opposition and bloggers who point out that PMB is a company owned by government investment fund Khazanah Nasional.

Tun Dr Mahathir's take on leasing a jet: 'It's necessary. I thought it should be a 747 or A380 but the government is being very careful because the government has no money. This plane costs only RM200 million.'

'It is not bought by the government, it's bought by somebody



else, and that somebody else is owned 100 per cent by the government.'

Another controversial issue was the planned merger of Malaysia's two oldest media groups that own Malay-language Utusan Malaysia and the New Straits Times.

Despite supporting the merger earlier, Datuk Seri Abdullah backed down after failing to get support from top Umno chiefs, who feared the merger would weaken Utusan's ability to project the voice of Malays.

Asked if abandoning the plan was a setback for Datuk Seri Abdullah,

Tun Dr Mahathir said: 'No, it is not true. It is just that they are democratic. They listen to people. If people don't like it, they don't like it.'

The sarcasm was not lost on reporters, because Tun Dr Mahathir had bitterly attacked the government when it scrapped a plan to build a bridge across the Johor Strait, after saying that was a decision made by the people.

Asked whether he was happy with the government's policy of letting the Ringgit strengthen, he said: 'I am happy with whatever the government does.'

The Ringgit traded at around 3.5 per US dollar in early February, its highest level in about nine years.

Tun Mahathir was also asked to comment on the by-election in Batu Talam, Pahang, which the ruling Barisan Nasional won by a big margin against an independent.

Referring to comments by Deputy Premier Najib Razak, he replied: 'Datuk Najib said it is evidence of the confidence of the whole country in the administration of Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Badawi. I second that.'

case of the bridge, Malaysia defended Singapore's rights even before Singapore claimed those rights.

When Minister Mentor Lee Kwan Yew made disparaging remarks about the way Malaysia treats its citizens of Chinese descent there was hardly a squeak from the PM. The DPM said it was naughty of Singapore.

When public opinion against Kwan Yew's remarks strengthened, the PM said he would write to the Minister Mentor. His letter to Kwan Yew was not made public but Singapore publicised Kwan Yew's reply. He did not apologise but merely said he regretted he had caused discomfort to Malaysia's PM. Since Dato Seri Abdullah's letter was not made public I can only assume that no apology was asked for by Dato Seri Abdullah. He appeared to have said that he felt discomfort over what Kwan Yew said. What is more he practically instructed the nation not to say anything more about the matter.

FORWARD: Tun, what about you, Proton and the Approved Permits issue?

TUN: I had been following the development with regard to Proton, the national car. When I stepped down, Proton was doing very well. It had four billion Ringgit in cash and was able to invest RM1.8 billion in a new plant in Tanjung Malim. It still had more than RM2 billion in cash left.

I had asked Datuk Seri Abdullah to ap-

point me as adviser to Proton when I stepped down. But almost a year passed before I was appointed. Still I was very happy to be involved in the national car project again.

I found that Proton was facing unfair competition. Thousands of cheap foreign cars were being imported and all of them grossly underdeclared their value in order to pay less import duty. Although Proton paid less taxes in the form of excise duty, the underdeclaration reduced the prices of foreign cars. Proton sales were going down.

I wrote to the Minister of International Trade and Industry but received no satisfactory reply. Thousands of Approved Permits continued to be given out and no action was taken over the underdeclared import prices.

I gave an interview to Utusan Malaysia and pointed out that two individuals were getting thousands of Approved Permits which they sold for as much as RM60,000 each. I demanded that the Ministry name the recipients.

The PM directed that the names of the recipients be made public. Sure enough 90% of the permits went to two persons who were making money merely selling the permits.

Approved Permits were introduced because Malays found difficulty in becoming agents for motor-vehicles because sole importers refused to appoint them. The AP enabled Malays to import reconditioned cars direct and sell them without going through the sole importers.

Some Malays were thus able to go into this business. But many simply sold the APs to Chinese car dealers. When I was Minister of Trade and Industry I stopped issuing APs to Malays unless they had showrooms and real evidence they were doing business.

After I stepped down more APs were issued without checking whether the recipients were carrying out real

business. Then I discovered that almost 20,000 of the APs were given free to two persons who sold them for millions of Ringgit. All kinds of new categories of cars were allowed to be imported, not just reconditioned cars.

This was not what the APs were for. But the Ministry seemed to ignore the objective of the Government and instead wanted to enrich a few Malay friends who were not even doing business. The Ministry was abetting in the abuse of the APs. And the Minister knew it. So she was abetting in this abuse of authority. I have information that this abuse is still going on.

The PM should have disciplined the Minister. But instead she was reappointed when a new Cabinet was formed.

In the meantime Proton sacked Tengku Mahaleel as Chief Executive Officer. Since the sacking Proton which was a profitable company has lost millions of dollars. Its share of the market is now less than a perodua.

Many top executives of Proton have left the company, production is now less than half planned capacity and new models that should have come out in 2005 have not been launched till now. The share price went down from RM9 to less than RM5 at

one time.

FORWARD: And now Proton is in trouble?

TUN: The talk now is about selling



Proton. With more than RM10 billion in assets it is an attractive buy. Simply by selling off the land and the factories the buyer can recover his investment.

Agusta, the Italian motorcycle company bought by Proton for 70 million Euro was sold to some unknown Italian company for one Euro. For no reason Proton lost almost RM500 million because of this sale. The Securities Commission approved this decision to lose company money because it is only a "small" amount.

The decline in the sale of Proton has caused serious problems for the dealers and vendors, many of whom are Malays. The spin-off into the engineering industry will now be reversed.

For no very good reason the Government of Datuk Seri Abdullah has allowed a major national industry to fail. A company that was highly profitable is now floundering around, losing money.

I found that my comments on Proton was no longer tolerated. The Press refused to report anything that I said.

FORWARD: When did the Press stop publishing your views?

TUN: After my criticism of the decision not to build the bridge the Government went all out to prevent me from airing my views anywhere.

More than fifteen of the invitations to me from the party and private organisations were withdrawn. All said they had been pressured by the Menteri Besar or party chiefs or by the police. I am now unable to speak or to get what I say reported in the media. Only the web sites and bloggers dare to report. They too have come under pressure.

This is unprecedented. During the time I was Prime Minister former Prime Ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Hussein Onn were free to criticise me and even to side with my opponents. In fact Dato Seri Abdullah himself was free to campaign against me when he threw his lot with Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

Now I am totally banned from meeting Umno people, avoided by Umno and Barisan Nasional leaders, bad mouthed by Ministers and my former Cabinet colleagues and treated like a party pariah.



But what happens to me is not important. As a politician I have to accept being disliked by other politicians, by leaders of the Government.

UMNO members of my division were even bribed into not electing me as delegate to the UMNO General Assembly.

FORWARD: Your criticisms have come at a great cost to you...

TUN: But what happens to me is not important. As a politician I have to accept being disliked by other politicians, by leaders of the Government. What I am concerned with is that the action and policies of the present Government continue to be bad for the country, bad for the people and not in accord with the objective of creating a balanced society according to the New Economic Policy.

APs are still being given out to the same people in big numbers. Underdeclaration of import prices of cars is still going on. Parts of Johor are to be made effectively Singapore territory. None of the problems with Singapore has been resolved or attempts made to resolve them.

Contracts including for mega projects are being given out without proper procedure. There is no transparency in the giving out of contracts.

High Government spending is hidden behind so-called Private Finance Initiative where Government guarantees profits for the developers.

For three years the 9th Malaysia Plan has been publicised but practically nothing is happening on the ground.

A large sum of money running into hundreds of millions has been spent on

the Monsoon Cup. It had not drawn tourists despite the media hype.

The family of Datuk Seri Abdullah is still very much involved in Government affairs, still getting contracts, not directly perhaps but still going on. Approvals for awards of contracts are still being made by the Prime Minister without proper procedure.

By his own admission his son is now very rich. And the son-in-law is certainly not poor. Is it a coincidence that wealth came after he became Prime Minister? Other relatives are also rich now.

FORWARD: What is the cost of all these to Malaysians?

TUN: The country has lost its image as the champion of the poor and the weak. As host and leading country in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Malaysia have been slow to respond to international events. When it does, it failed to make any impact. No one looks up to Malaysia anymore.

Perhaps the Government of Datuk Seri Abdullah does not care for Malaysia's image among developing countries. But the developed countries with which Malaysia tries hard to be friendly and not to criticise do not seem to appreciate Malaysia's stance either.

I did not comment or criticise these things before because of my pledge until the dropping of the bridge project. When I made the pledge I did not think Dato Seri Abdullah Badawi would sully the country's honour and prestige. But the bridge affair broke my resolve.

FORWARD: These are some tough accusations, Tun, why hasn't the Malaysian people acted upon them?

TUN: The Government may try to seal my mouth but I will continue to expose the wrong things that Datuk Seri Abdullah is doing. I will not cease until he stops abusing his authority and restores the integrity and honour of this country.

The majority of Malaysians may not want to leave their comfort zones but I am convinced that the Government of Datuk Seri Abdullah will so damage the country that the comfort zones will disappear. ■