

Forward: Your criticisms have come at a great cost to you

...But what happens to me isn't important

— Tun Mahathir

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad gave an interview recently to a team from Forward, a sister magazine of Milenia Muslim. The following is sincere explanation by Tun on why he spoke out on issues that put him in the bad light as far as his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is concerned.

Since he took office in 2003 Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has shifted some of the focus to agriculture and stopped some construction projects including the double track rail project and the crooked bridge on the Tebrau Straits to Singapore, to replace the existing Causeway.

The Government said it aborted the project because it could not meet the demands of the Singapore Government, which included rights to buy sand and use of Malaysian airspace for its military.

The cancellation brought out an unprecedented outburst from Tun Mahathir, and began what has been a public falling out between the two.

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?

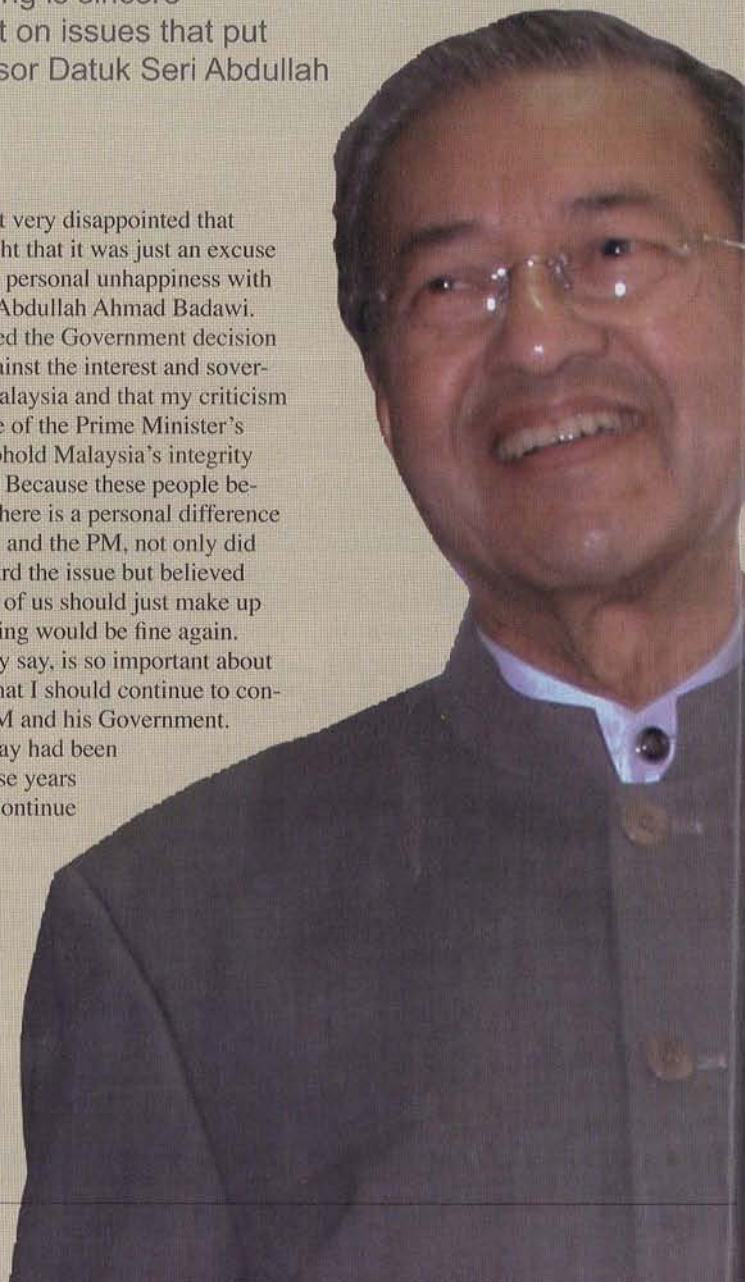
TUN MAHATHIR: When I criticised the Government and the Prime Minister for dropping the Malaysia/Singapore

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 condemn 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

- 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 go it alone 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 have to build their half of the bridge, it would be wrong. But PM

Abdullah seem to consider Singapore has an absolute right to demand for sand and overflying rights 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: 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. 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 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 Chinese 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 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 occasion when he requested to see me. Mostly he talked about what he was doing. I did not venture to comment and he did not ask for my opinion. Hidung tak mancing.

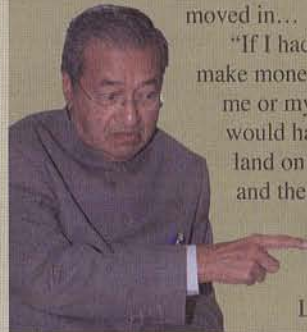
For the 9th Malaysia Plan he saw me

'If I had wanted to make money...'

WHEN Tun Mahathir Mohamad was still the Prime Minister, he kept many things to himself. He did not confide most of these even to his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali. She did not even know the exact date of the general elections until the day he announced them.

The Tun recently told Milenia Muslim of the time when he, and he alone, knew what big plans were in store for Langkawi. He had visions of a fully developed vacation getaway for Langkawi. The future for the sleepy island was fantastic.

"No one knew what was in store for Langkawi. Because I and I alone knew what I had planned for the island," said Tun Mahathir. "Just imagine if word leaked out and speculators moved in...



"If I had wanted to make money for me or my family, I would have bought land on the island and then announced the plans for Langkawi. Land on the

island was dirt cheap then, only about RM500 an acre. "Imagine if I had bought 100 acres. It would have cost me only half a million ringgit."

Tun Mahathir's plans for Langkawi was subsequently made public. The was a flurry of activities on the island. Hotels and resorts were built and the tourists started coming. And the rest is history.

"Now a prime acre in Langkawi can easily fetch RM1 million," said Tun Mahathir. He could easily have made a RM450 million profit, had he bought the 100 acres.

"But I was entrusted by the rakyat to govern the country, and any vision I had to develop any area was never for my own personal gain. They were all for the rakyat," he said.

We shudder to think of what would have been the profits Tun Mahathir would have reaped had he bought land in and around Sepang before KLIA and Putrajaya were planned. Because these were two of his other mega plans that he probably had kept secret. "Now some of my relatives are not talking to me, as I had never helped them become rich when I was the Prime Minister," said Tun Mahathir.

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, particu-

larly 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 projects 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 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 folded 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 have 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 agricul-

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

'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.'

tural 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

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

Tun Mahathir dicalon untuk Hadiah Nobel

Sumbangannya mempengaruhi dunia, kata NGO Bosnia-Herzegovina

EMPAT Pertubuhan Bukan Kerajaan di Bosnia dan Herzegovina telah mencalonkan Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad sebagai penerima Hadiah Nobel Keamanan 2007. Pertubuhan tersebut adalah Sekolah Sains Sarajevo, Kongres Intelektual Bosnik dan dua pertubuhan Kristian – Majlis Sivik Serb dari Bosnia Herzegovina dan Majlis Kebangsaan Croat. Pencalonan itu dicadangkan oleh Dr Ejup Ganic, Naib Presiden Bosnia Herzegovina (1990-1996) dan Presiden Persekutuan Bosnia Herzegovina sehingga Mac, 2001.

Dr Ganic yang kini Canselor Sekolah Sains dan Teknologi, menyifatkan pemilihan Dr Mahathir adalah tepat kerana Malaysia di bawah kepimpinan beliau amat banyak membantu memberikan sumbangan kepada kemajuan ekonomi, politik dan kemanusiaan kepada Bosnia-Herzegovina sewaktu negara itu melalui proses pemulihan akibat trauma pembantaian etnik pada tahun 1992 hingga 1995.

Pencalonan untuk Ahli Jawatankuasa Nobel Norwegian ditutup pada 1 Februari lepas dan pada tahun ini antara yang tersenarai sebagai calon termasuklah bekas Naib Presiden Amerika Syarikat (AS) Al Gore. Dr Ganic dalam laporan pencalonannya itu berkata 'Dr Mahathir is the Third World's "most illustrious contemporary" dan "most courageous advocate." Jelasnya lagi, Dr Mahathir selepas persaraannya sebagai Perdana Menteri Malaysia, telah meninggalkan kesan mendalam kepada dunia dan menampilkan contoh teladan tentang kaedah penyelesaian konflik dan bagaimana masyarakat etnik majmuk boleh dioptimumkan untuk membangun kemajuan ekonomi dan sistem politik yang berkesan. Polisi Prosper Thy Neighbour Dr Mahathir juga diiktiraf sebagai memartabatkan visi Islam serta tugasnya sebagai duta perdamaian di Iran-Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Selatan Thailand, Filipina dan Aceh.



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 Datuk 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 any 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 appoint 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 per cent of the permits went to two persons who were making millions 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 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. 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 stand 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 Malaysians 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. **MM**