

# Policy of openness a new experience

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has defended his policy of openness, which he says has created a new situation in the country where even backbenchers in Parliament now have no qualms about criticising the Government.

"This is what openness is all about," he told some 300 CEOs and corporate figures at a dinner organised by the Kuala Lumpur Business Club here on Monday night. "Everybody says what they want.

"I tell my ministers they should not be upset with the various accusations against them and their ministries.

"The Barisan Nasional (BN) has a big majority (in Parliament) and the BN backbenchers have been a highly critical lot, which shows that the big majority has not become a huge rubber stamp."

Abdullah cited private television

station TV3's frequent reports on things it claimed had gone wrong in the country.

"It is better to know than not to know," he said. "It is dangerous if you don't know because it might explode right in your face."

The Prime Minister said during a question-and-answer session with the audience that it did not bother him a bit that some people had interpreted his openness as a sign of weakness.

"It doesn't matter what people say about me. Whether this policy will continue under future leaders, we will never know what will happen. Sometimes things are done according to a particular period of time," he said.

"Now I am happy that the people who are not happy with what is happening, like non-governmental organisations, are sending letters and having meetings with the BN backbenchers. At least they

recognise that the backbenchers are working," he said.

On the "little Napoleons" he had recently criticised in the civil service, he said it was unfair to tar the entire public service because of the few who caused problems.

He likened this to the recent spate of police-bashing, which he said was also unfair just because of a few black sheep in the force.

"If the police had not been doing their job right, we would not have peace and stability in this country.

"Of course there are some members of the police who need to be disciplined, and action will be taken against them.

"It is better they (civil servants) leave rather than we throw them out. I know, I have been in public service since 1964," said the civil servant turned politician.

He said in calling for action to be taken against irresponsible civil servants or policemen, people

seemed to "want to see blood all the time".

"But in this country we have laws, and we have to uphold the rule of law."

Abdullah also spoke of the short messaging service (SMS), which he described as the "most abused gadget" in Malaysia.

"I do not know what SMS is for," he said, apparently referring to the medium being used for negative purposes such as rumour-mongering.

"That is the problem with us, sometimes we are easily influenced," he said.

In this connection, the Prime Minister said he was worried about the just-launched "Rakan Cop" service to enable the public to report on crime.

"We wouldn't know if these messages are genuine or if they will send the police on a wild goose chase," he said. — Bernama