

08 FEB 1998

Hamid-Apostasy

NOR AISHAH HAS NEVER ABANDONED ISLAM, SAYS MINISTER

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 8 (Bernama) -- Nor Aishah Bokhari, the bank teller, alleged to have renounced Islam to marry her non-Muslim boyfriend had never left the religion, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman said today.

Investigation by Pusat Islam confirmed that the woman was involved in a love affair with her boyfriend without the blessings of her parents.

Hamid said Aishah never had the intention to change her religion.

"She has a very strong religious background and her love for the man is nothing unusual," he told reporters at a Hari Raya reception at his residence here, today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Sulaiman Daud, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar and foreign envoys were among the guests at the open house.

Abdul Hamid was asked to comment on the latest development in the case, in which Aishah was reported to have run away from home with her boyfriend Joseph Arnold Lee on Dec 30.

Abdul Hamid however said Pusat Islam had no information on her whereabouts but his officers were in touch with her family.

He said in Malaysia when a Muslim wished to marry a non-Muslim, the normal practice was for the non-Muslim to accept the Islamic faith.

"And we will continue to maintain this practice, because religious conversion is a sensitive matter," he added.

In the Nor Aishah case, Pusat Islam will advise the two families to deal with the issue rationally and to allow the pair to marry.

"Such a marriage was not unusual in the country", Abdul Hamid said. --
BERNAMA

RAZ HAR ABG