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There are no hidden motives, says DPM (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - There are no hidden motives, no attempts to discriminate against any group in the Government's decision to include religion in new identity cards.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Cabinet, and not the National Registration Department, had deliberated on the matter at length.

"As you know, the Cabinet comprises Ministers of various religions and races ... all are satisfied and have given their agreement, so it is better that the decision is accepted."

Therefore, do not make this a political issue, he said after opening Koperasi Belia Nasional's 15th annual general meeting at Dynasty Hotel.

Abdullah was commenting on a statement by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism urging the Government to reconsider the matter.

Council president A. Vaithilingam said the mention of race and/or religion could lead to bias and discrimination.

He expressed concern over the "arbitrary methods" used by the NRD in identifying a person's religion.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the Cabinet decision was made sometime back but only implemented recently.

"Therefore, it is proper that I give an explanation on the matter so that no one will use it for their political purposes."

Thus far, the new feature has been included in the identity cards of some 100,000 applicants.

Abdullah said the objections did not come from all quarters but only from those wanting an assurance that the move would not lead to any discrimination.

"There is no hidden motive, no attempts to discriminate," he said.

Abdullah had said on Friday that the decision to indicate religious faith on identity cards would help in cases where quick identification is needed.

Disputes in the claiming of bodies, during Ramadan or when people enter casinos are some of the reasons why religion should be stated on the IC.

On views that the name of a person was adequate to indicate his religious affiliation, Abdullah said some method of certainty was needed to determine one's religion.

"In a society like Malaysia where we have Chinese who look like Malays and Malays who look like Chinese, it will be easy if the religion is indicated on the identity cards.

"So I think it is wise that the feature be included."

On those who convert to another religion, Abdullah said the NRD should be informed of the necessary changes to be made.

Asked to comment on Pas publishing pictures of children as members of Rakan Kelab Bestari Harakah in the party's official newspaper, Abdullah felt it should be stopped.

"It is not wise to involve children in politics.

"It is a form of discrimination."

On the remark by Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Wanita members played a crucial role in winning elections, Abdullah said it was intended to spur them to work harder.

"From visits and meetings that I have had with Wanita, I can see that

they are committed and determined to set aside any differences for the sake of the party."

Asked whether unity and the ability of Wanita members to deliver could delay Dr Mahathir from calling for an early election, Abdullah said it was not a factor.

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