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Committee will decide on talks

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Umno management committee will decide whether to accept Pas' offer for talks on Malay unity, party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

However, Abdullah said he had not received any letter from Pas stating its intention to hold talks with Umno.

"I have not received any official letter yet. I only read about Pas' intention in the newspapers," he told reporters after opening the Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's 50th annual delegates conference.

Abdullah, who had a busy schedule all week, said the letter had probably been sent to his office.

A local daily today reported that Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor had written to Abdullah seeking an appointment for a meeting.

The daily said Pas secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa had confirmed the letter was sent to Abdullah's office.

Asked why Pas was interested in holding Malay unity talks now when it had laid several conditions last year, Abdullah said he did not know.

"That you must ask them (Pas)," he said.

Abdullah said as far as Umno was concerned, its proposal to hold unity talks then was genuine as this was for the good of the community. "To me, what brings good (to the community) should be pursued."

Asked whether Pas' move to hold unity talks with Umno was a tactic to divert attention from its problems with the DAP, Abdullah said this would only come to light after Umno had been briefed by Pas on why it wished to pursue the talks.

Abdullah was also asked whether it was true that Pas decided to hold talks with Umno now because Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was overseas.

To this he replied: "It is difficult to answer questions which are mere assumptions. I really don't know."

When contacted by Bernama later, Fadzil said he wanted to meet Abdullah in his capacity as Home Minister to discuss the blanket ban imposed by the authorities on political ceramah.

"The news report is confusing," he said.

Abdullah was also asked to comment on the move by the Immigration Department requiring the citizens of several African countries to apply for visas to enter Malaysia following the increasing number of crimes committed by them.

"The number is not limited to six countries.

"We will do the same thing to citizens of other countries who cause similar problems," he said, adding that the Immigration Department should inform Wisma Putra of crimes committed by foreigners.

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said the Government had never ignored the interests of the Indian community.

He said the Government's move to increase the equity ownership of the Indian community from 1.5 per cent at present to three per cent under the Third Outline Perspective Plan was testimony to its seriousness to help the community progress further.

Abdullah said MAICCI had contributed positively to the Indian community as well as to the economy in the past 50 years.

Later, Abdullah received contributions from State MAICCI representatives and two educational institutions for the chamber's building and education

funds.