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Malaysians told not to interfere

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LANGKAWI, Wed. - Malaysians have been urged not to go to Afghanistan to fight with Taliban forces against the United States.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today Malaysians should not be seen as interfering in Afganistan's internal affairs and that it was best for the people to support the Government on the issue.

"We shouldn't be seen as interfering in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan," the Home Minister told reporters after the Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Gunung Raya here.

Abdullah had been asked to comment on a statement by Pas secretary-general Nashruddin Mat Isa that the party had given the green light to its members to fight with Taliban forces.

Nashruddin had said the Pas leadership had declared a jihad against the United States for its retaliation against Afghanistan following the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

He had also said Pas members were not required to seek the party's approval if they wished to take up the fight in Afghanistan.

Without discounting the possibility of Nashruddin's statement being an attempt by Pas to gain popularity, Abdullah said Pas should not "recommend" such things because "we should not be meddling in the affairs of Afghanistan".

He said the Government was not aware if there were Malaysians already fighting in Afghanistan.

Besides the American-led attacks, Afghanistan was going through an escalating civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

Abdullah said Malaysia sympathised with what was happening in Afghanistan but this did not mean "we should send our people to Afghanistan".

He said it was important for the people to support the Government's effort in initiating a United Nations conference to discuss the issue of terrorism.

He said the discussion should focus on the definition of terrorism.

"It should look at who can be referred to as terrorists and whether the fight to free their countries can be referred to as terrorism.

"To some, they would be referred as terrorists but, to others, they would be referred as freedom fighters," he said.

Abdullah said there was a need for the people to understand issues that were facing the world.

He said the Government had instructed Malaysian ambassadors to seek the views of leaders in other countries with a hope of getting their support for the conference.

"We are also hoping the United Nations would be willing to host the conference."

He said overcoming the problem of terrorism should involve an understanding of all parties.

"It is not limited to one particular country. We need an understanding and an exchange of information on terrorism because terrorists could be found anywhere and we could track their movements through co-operation."

Abdullah said with the support of the people, the Government is confident of succeeding in holding the conference.

Meanwhile, Umno Information chief Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said Pas should focus on improving the standard of living of Muslims in the country instead asking them to go to Afghanistan.

He said Pas should upgrade the life of Muslims, especially those in Kelantan and Terengganu in terms of education and technology.

Mustapa added that Pas has to be fair to the people in the two States, who were still far behind in terms of economy, investments and job opportunities.