

10 MAR 2001
Abdullah-PAS

UMNO STILL WANTS TO MEET PAS DESPITE ANOTHER PRECONDITION, SAYS DPM

PETALING JAYA, March 10 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that Umno still wants to hold a meeting with PAS to discuss Malay unity even though the opposition party has put forward another precondition.

Abdullah, who is Umno deputy president, said that PAS had the right to set conditions but Umno had explained its intention and purpose in calling for a meeting.

"They are at liberty, their right to do so," he told a news conference after launching the "International Year of Volunteers 2001" here.

He said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is Umno president, had clearly stated Umno's intention and purpose for the meeting to be held and as such it should proceed.

Abdullah was asked to comment on a statement by PAS secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa that the scope of the meeting should be expanded from the topic of Malay interests under the federal constitution as proposed by Umno to various other matters as enshrined in the constitution including freedom to peaceful assembly.

Nasharuddin however said last night that PAS was not setting a new precondition but only proposing that the matter be included for discussion.

PAS has called off the Umno-PAS meeting scheduled for Feb 19 and set three preconditions before a meeting could take place.

They want oil royalty payment to Terengganu to be restored instead of the special payment channelled directly to the people in the PAS-led state as decided by the federal government, the PAS official organ "Harakah" to be allowed to be published twice weekly as previously instead of twice monthly at present, and the proposal for a ban of the use of the word Islam on the name of political parties by Umno be called off.

Abdullah said that PAS knew the intention and purpose of Umno in proposing the meeting and PAS was likely to set more conditions for Umno to fulfil.

"The question of PAS setting this and that conditions, it is their right. They already know what we want to talk about...it's only a question of whether they want to meet or not," he said.

Last Thursday, Dr Mahathir said that Umno wants to discuss with PAS matters affecting the interests of the Malays, namely the special rights of the Malays, the position of Islam and the national language, and the status of the Malay Rulers, as enshrined in the constitution.

Abdullah, when asked whether the conditions imposed by PAS show that the party does not wish the meeting to proceed, Abdullah said: "Let the people make their own interpretation".

Asked regarding the candidate to head Puteri Umno, to be set up by Umno for the younger generation of women in the country, Abdullah said that the party was still waiting for the list of candidates nominated by the state Wanita Umno movements.

"We have not yet received the full list. Maybe the Umno divisions and branches are busy with their meetings," he said.

The Umno Supreme Council at its meeting yesterday agreed that the age limit for the Puteri Umno head be fixed at 40 and members at 35.

-- BERNAMA
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