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Umno-PAS

UMNO WILLING TO WORK WITH PAS TO TACKLE SOCIAL ILLS - ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 22 (Bernama) -- Umno is prepared to cooperate with PAS to jointly find pragmatic solutions to issues related to faith, progress of Muslims and the country, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

The Prime Minister said: "We can discuss specific matters. I hope we can discuss matters that will not create animosity among fellow Muslims, especially issues on Islamic faith.

"I hope this matter will not be turned into a political issue.

"What's important is how we give attention to the progress of Muslims and the nation," said Abdullah, who is also acting Umno President.

Abdullah was speaking to reporters at the Gerakan Chinese New Year open house at Menara PGRM. Present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, cabinet ministers and foreign diplomats.

The presence of former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, turned the open house, attended by more than 5,000 people, more merrier.

Abdullah said this when asked to comment on the statement by PAS President Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang yesterday that his party was prepared to cooperate with Umno to discuss issues on serious crime that are on the rise in the country.

"Perhaps, we can also cooperate on foreign policies that are of interest to our country. We need to jointly defend the policies.

"In reality, there are signs that both parties can work together, especially on issues related to Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan.

"Actually, even all this while there are indications that we can cooperate on matters like Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan.

"These are international issues that are supported by Malaysians of all races regardless of religion.

"I believe we need to have an understanding with all opposition parties, not only with PAS," he added.

Abdullah also confirmed speaking to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat yesterday on the latest developments in West Asia as reported by the

Bahrain News Agency.

"Yes, it (the report) is true," he said when asked to confirm the wire service report.

Pressed for details of the conversation, he said: "I cannot reveal to you the contents of my conversation with Yasser Arafat."

According to the report, the two leaders agreed to coordinate the stand on the issue of building a separation wall which had been referred to the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

It also said Abdullah gave an assurance that Malaysia would continue to support Palestinians in their struggle and achieve the objective of setting up an independent Palestine state in their own land.

-- BERNAMA

SR AZZ TOM