

Umno, MCA still good friends

UMNO and MCA are still good friends despite them criticising each other during their respective party assemblies, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said what was important was that both parties could still talk to each other about their concerns and differences within the limits.

At a press conference after the second day of the 57th Umno General Assembly at Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Abdullah said: "I think friends must be sincere enough to discuss their differences and concerns. So long as we can talk and make sure we don't cross the limits, it's acceptable.

"But do be careful," he said in response to the question whether Umno and MCA targeted each other during their party meetings.

Asked whether some Umno delegates had gone against his advice not to hurt the feelings of Barisan Nasional component party members when raising issues, Abdullah said they spoke their minds on issues that had been of concern to them for a while.

He hoped that now when they had said what they needed to say they would not repeat their words and "go though the same climate of unhappiness."

Although some speakers had spoken very strongly on certain

issues, he said they had kept within limits and that this was acceptable, adding that he was satisfied with the proceedings so far.

On the statement by certain delegates that Malays were the masters of the country, Abdullah said that was just the feelings of Umno members and he believed the non-Malays understood that.

"There are no masters. If we were masters, all chairmen and general managers would be Malays. But as you see it is not so.

"But let it not come to a stage where we want to chase them (non-Malays) out, and use a walking cane to shoo them back. That will not happen," he said.

However, Abdullah said there was a reason for the Malays outburst over certain issues that surfaced over the past few months, which had naturally caused the reaction.

"We need to tackle them otherwise it might reach an undesirable situation. Sometimes it is only a simple argument and then becomes a shouting match leading to fistfights. We don't want this to happen and this is why we need to be careful," he said.

He said interracial relations were not at a worrying level as far as he was concerned.

"But it is time to remind people and lay down the ground rules and that is exactly what I have said," he added.

Asked if the reason delegates

were openly criticising BN leaders was due to the greater freedom he had given people, Abdullah said the people were perhaps reacting to the space that he had allowed for democratic discourse.

He also confirmed that the proposal to set up an interfaith council had been rejected.

However, the Prime Minister said the religious concerns aired by various parties had not been dismissed and that they were important.

Earlier, Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein described the fiery and emotional outbursts of his members at the assembly as "all in a day's work".

"That is quite normal. They

can say whatever they want to say, They have a job to do and we have a job to do," he said.

He was responding to regrets expressed by MCA Youth that Umno Youth delegate had made strong criticisms against certain MCA, Gerakan and MIC leaders.

Hishammuddin said his movement had no quarrel with its MCA counterpart, adding: "At the end of the day, we are all part of Barisan Nasional."

On Wednesday, MCA Youth chief Datuk Liow Tiong Lai said the criticisms were made despite top Umno leaders having called on delegates to refrain from making irresponsible statements that would hurt the feelings of other races.