

PM: We can now talk openly

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun — Malaysians now feel more comfortable with each other, enabling them to discuss even the most sensitive issues openly, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

He attributed this high level of comfort to the various races having realised the importance of considering racial and religious feelings and sensitivities.

"We no longer feel shy or afraid to discuss sensitive issues.

"We learn to control (our feelings) when we talk about sensitive matters.

"Today, functions and receptions provide a comfortable

feeling where we can sit at the same table and eat together without constraints in the presence of friends of different races and religions," he said after opening the 51st People's Progressive Party annual general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre today.

Abdullah said this culture was not achieved overnight or without good leadership and guidance.

"This is something that happened progressively. You think things can happen overnight?

"You think that the various communities will say, 'I respect everything and let us think of something new?'

"It is not easy. Even today, you can still hear voices here and there talking and demanding all sorts of things

even after so many years of independence.

"Quite often, writers and magazines also raise matters which are not helping," he added.

Abdullah, however, acknowledged that some demands raised were legitimate aspirations of certain communities and gave an assurance that these would be addressed.

"I have never run away from anything and neither had Tun Dr Mahathir (Mohamad). We just make the best possible decisions under the circumstances before us," he added.

Abdullah, who is BN chairman, was also happy that the comfort level among the 14 BN component parties had

reached a desired level and issues like religion could be discussed openly in the BN supreme Council, the Cabinet and Cabinet committees where leaders of the various races were represented.

"The comfort level has certainly risen higher than before. There is mutual trust, better understanding of problems and a collective responsibility to strive for UN's struggle.

"Previously, when certain matters such as religious issues cropped up, we would either leave it to certain groups representing religion (to address them) or we didn't talk at all.

"We would just leave the matter to the party chairman or the Prime Minister but now there's no problem; even during Dr Mahathir's time, I saw the comfort level rising.



POETRY IN MOTION: Abdullah, with Kadir (right) and Lim (second from right), greeting the crowd at the poem recital.

"We do not feel shy or afraid to discuss because we have taught ourselves to bear in mind that we are discussing a very sensitive matter but can still give views which can be considered before certain decisions are made.

"That is what BN is today," he remarked.

In his address, Abdullah, who is Umno president-elect, said BN's policies were dynamic and effective as the coalition took the view of all parties, irrespective of their race or religion into account when drawing up its policies.

He also attributed BN's resounding victory in the last general election to BN members not bickering over policies introduced by the country's leaders.

On the seat distribution among component parties in the general election, Abdullah said it was not an easy exercise for him but he had tried his best to satisfy all the component parties.

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— *Abdullah*