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Tough issues need time to settle, says PM

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KOTA KINABALU: The prime minister said that he has never evaded tough issues but that some needed time to settle and wait for a thorough evaluation.

"If we find there are problems that are difficult to solve, and if we need to make changes to the law, we can do so," Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said at the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko) convention here yesterday.

"However, all this cannot be rushed. Some issues are very important and they have to be considered. One group can express views strongly, and so can another group. How do you manage this? It is not easy."

Abdullah was replying to Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, who had expressed concern about the jurisdictions of the civil and syariah legal systems.

He said while the constitution and Rukun Negara, together with other policies, should be used as guidelines for a multiracial and multi-religious population, amendments to legislation may be looked into for the more intractable problems.

"If legislation has to be amended, then this has to be taken up by parliament."

Where law enforcement is excessive, "the cabinet's stand is to put a stop to it because this is not the way things are done", he said.

Dompok said in his speech that convention members had resolved on the need to clear up discrepancies in the coverage of the civil and syariah courts, which had resulted in rulings that were "unhealthy" for race relations.

"Bernard (Dompok) has raised some of these issues in the cabinet and we have discussed them to decide on the best compromise. It may not be satisfactory to all, but no one's opinion is blocked," Abdullah said.

Glancing at the Upko president and minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Abdullah said he was aware that the issues were serious and that he would not run away from them.

"I have never run away, you know me. There will be a point where we can meet and accept certain things.

"I accept the fact that there are many issues and that I have to be firm, but I am the prime minister for all ethnic groups and people of different religions.

"I am your prime minister," he said to rousing applause from the 500 delegates gath-



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (centre) and Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok (in headgear behind Abdullah) at the party's convention in Kota Kinabalu yesterday.

ered at the Magellan Sutera Hotel.

Dompok also touched on the importance of unity, poverty and a list of other problems, such as equity for all Bumiputeras.

Abdullah gave his assurance that the government was fair to all Malaysians, regardless of race or religion.

He later attended a closed-door meeting with Sabah Umno members before ending his three-day visit to Sabah.



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