

Abdullah reaffirms case for tolerance

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PUTRAJAYA: Fiery and emotional speeches made during the Umno general assembly last week became a major topic at the weekly Cabinet meeting yesterday in an atmosphere which further simmered down temperatures.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who had calmed the situation in his conciliatory winding-up speech at the assembly last Friday, took another opportunity, this time on a government platform, to reaffirm his case for tolerance and fairness.

It is understood that the prime minister explained at great length that despite issues raised by delegates during the assembly, the Umno-led Barisan Nasional government had always been fair and just to everyone irrespective of race or religion.

"As what he had said in his winding-up speech at the assembly, the prime minister said the speeches did not in any way reflect Umno's stand and the ministers from BN component parties understood and accepted this," said a minister.

It is learnt that several senior Cabinet ministers who are party leaders — such as Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting (MCA), Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu (MIC) and Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik (Gerakan) — also spoke on the issue.

They were said to have mainly expressed their support for Abdullah for his winding-up speech and also touched on whether there was a need to have live television coverage of general assemblies of political parties in the future.

Another minister said although the issue could be considered a political or party matter, it was brought up at Cabinet level as it involves the bigger picture of national unity and interest.

The minister said Abdullah stressed dur-

ing yesterday's meeting that Umno would continue to practise tolerance and co-operation, the main thrust and principle in the BN.

In the discussion, it is understood that MCA gave the view that there was no necessity for meetings or general assemblies of political parties in the country to be televised live.

This was confirmed by MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Chan Kong Choy who said the party expressed its views on the matter to Abdullah as BN chairman.

"We have expressed our views and MCA's stand is that meetings or assemblies are parties' internal matters. We do not see the need for such events to be shown live on national television," said the transport minister after his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.