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PM says he met top Pas leaders over unity talks

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has admitted to having held three meetings, to date, with top Pas leaders on Islam and Malay unity.

The prime minister, who is also Umno president, declined to name who he had met, except to say that Pas spiritual leader Datuk Seri Nik Aziz Nik Mat was not part of the talks.

Abdullah would not say when the meetings took place.

Speaking on the subject last week, he only said Umno "welcomed" Pas' willingness to hold such talks.

"I have actually held meetings, three times, if you want to know.

"They were with high-level party leaders, individuals who have the power to make decisions.

"But I can say that Nik Aziz was not present," Abdullah said yesterday after launching the Malaysian Cooperatives Commission.

Nik Aziz opposes Umno-Pas cooperation on Malay unity and religious issues, calling the efforts a "trap" set by Umno.

Pas president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, however, is known to be in favour of the talks although he has said Pas would continue to be in the opposition under the Pakatan Rakyat banner.

Abdullah said no conditions were set during the talks, which he described as sincere discus-

sions. He said the talks were mainly about Islam and its influence on politics and Malay unity.

"If religious matters are politicised, it can bring a lot of problems to Muslims. We also talked about not fighting over religious issues.

"That's the main thing we talked about, I do not need to elaborate on the rest."

Abdullah said the talks did not address Pas' political cooperation with Parti Keadilan Rakyat and DAP. Asked if the dialogues yielded any consensus or proposals, Abdullah said "we have reached an understanding".

On Nik Aziz's suggestion that such talks be held through a third party, Abdullah said there was no need for an intermediary at this

stage.

"We are serious, we are not playing around."

On whether Umno's non-Malay counterparts in the Barisan Nasional coalition would be concerned about cooperation with Pas, Abdullah said he had not said anything to other component parties yet.

"It's just talks. We are talking about issues which I think are important, like Islam, because they do affect the Malays."

He had said previously that any decision to strengthen Malay unity would take into consideration the interests of non-Malays.

Pas and Umno have attempted to initiate such talks in the past. The idea resurfaced after the March 8 general election.