

THE STAR

DATE: 22/7 / 2008

# PAS-Umno talks a surprise

By JOCELINE TAN  
newsdesk@thestar.com.my

BN and Pakatan members unaware of meetings

The Star - 22/7/2008

**PETALING JAYA:** The advanced stage of the high-powered meetings between Umno and PAS has come as a complete surprise to political circles in the Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat.

The majority of them were unaware that the *muzakarah* (dialogue) had involved no less than Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and PAS deputy president Nasharudin Mat Isa or that the two sides had met three times.

Abdullah's revelation about the talks and some of the issues discussed has sent shock waves through the PAS rank-and-file who were unaware that the meetings had gone so far.

It has also shaken up PAS' partners in the Pakatan Rakyat who are not too happy that one of their allies has been talking to the "enemy" without consulting or informing them.

The participants of the *muzakarah* were so secretive that the meetings were held outside Putrajaya.

It is learnt that the pow-wows took place at the Prime Minister's other residence in Jalan Bellamy.

Although several top Umno leaders took part in the first meeting held a couple of days after the March elections, subsequent meetings involved primarily the Prime Minister because PAS leaders felt comfortable with him.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri

Najib Tun Razak knew of the talks but was not involved.

The key person from the PAS side was Nasharudin, a former university lecturer who went into full time politics in 1999. He has the backing of party president Datuk Seri Hadi Awang who has given a number of interviews hinting at the talks.

This group does not feel comfortable with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's leading of Pakatan Rakyat and views the DAP as a hurdle to its Islamic agenda.

PAS central committee member Khalid Samad, who was at the first talk, said it was never about whether PAS should join Umno or vice-versa.

"Despite the political overtones, it

was clearly about Islam and current Islamic issues, the Malays and national unity," said Khalid.

The group favouring the talks are now under pressure from the PAS grassroots who see the move as an act of betrayal against the party's policy. It has also caused a rift between Hadi and the powerful PAS spiritual leader Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat who is adamant that the talks stop immediately.

The Prime Minister's political secretary Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad said Abdullah was genuinely sincere about the talks.

"Pak Lah is thinking of the future of the nation. In his view, the Malays are the core group in the country. If

they are split, then it would be difficult for the country to progress.

"National unity also depends on Malay unity and it was on that principle that the meetings were conducted," he said.

Alwi said he and other Umno politicians had also held their own level of *muzakarah* with PAS leaders like vice-president Mahfuz Omar, treasurer Dr Hatta Ramli and Youth chief Salahuddin Ayub.

"I don't understand why PAS members are so rattled by the news. We are in this world to prepare for the next world.

"Some people prefer to take the journey along the *kampung* road. We prefer the highway but we don't mind if they join us on the highway," said Alwi.