

28/03/1998

Anwar: Problem in Kampung Rawa is settled, don't aggravate the situation

PENANG, Fri. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today the problem between two groups in the Kampung Rawa area has been settled and warned that tough action would be taken against anyone aggravating the situation.

He said the Kampung Rawa mosque committee and the Raja Raja Mathuraiveeran temple committee had accepted the solution of the State Government to the problem and to let the matter rest.

"The issue is considered closed," he said.

Earlier this afternoon, police fired tear gas to break up a clash between the groups at Kampung Rawa, off Jalan Petani, which left at least four people injured.

The four, including a 13-year-old schoolboy, were admitted to Penang Hospital.

Speaking to reporters at the Jalan Petani police station, Anwar said the situation was under control.

He said the four were slightly injured and several others sustained very minor injuries.

"There were minor skirmishes .... Police acted fast and took firm action. Several people were detained."

He said a problem arose between the groups due to the close proximity of the small Raja Raja Mathuraiveeran temple to the Kampung Rawa mosque. The temple and mosque are separated by a house.

The State Government then made available a piece of land in Jalan S.P.Chelliah, less than 1km away from the mosque, on Wednesday. The deities were shifted last night to the new temple site.

"The mosque and the temple committees have accepted the move of the temple. The situation is normal.

"The problem arose when rumours spread that there was a big fight and that the mosque was burnt down and the temple destroyed. Things were exaggerated. It became heated when outsiders came in today to incite the locals.

"The foreign press has given the impression that the situation is out of control and people have sustained serious injuries. I have talked to the Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and we agreed that we will be open about this issue to prevent the spread of misinformation or wrong information.

"We have also contacted, and been contacted, by Pas and DAP leaders and we have asked their co-operation not to turn it into a political issue and to let it remain a security issue."

Anwar said Malaysians must preserve the record of harmonious race and religious relations. It was a matter of pride and should be maintained, he added.

"I want to warn that we won't tolerate any attempt to aggravate the situation. We will act against those who spread rumours or aggravate the situation. We will work to ensure peace and harmony."

Also with him were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, most of the State Executive Councillors, mosque committee secretary Ahmad Johari Hamzah and temple secretary P. Nyanasegaran. Ahmad Johari and Nyanasegaran later shook hands and hugged each other.

(END)