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`Set up panel to deal with issues that may cause racial unrest'

A GOVERNMENT backbencher proposed that a National Solidarity Council be set up to advise Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on issues that could spark off racial unrest.

Abdul Aziz Yassin (BN-Muar) added that the proposed council should be placed under the Prime Minister's department and comprise "veteran politicians" and statesmen who had contributed to the nation building process.

He suggested among others, people like former deputy prime minister Tun Abdul Ghafar Baba, Tun Omar Yoke Lin Ong, former Penang Chief Minister Tun Lim Chong Eu and Tan Sri G. Pasamanickam as possible council members.

Abdul Aziz said veteran politicians from Sabah and Sarawak should also be included in the council.

In debating the motion of thanks on the Royal Address, he said, the council should be empowered to study issues that could create racial unrest in the country.

"The council must also be given the power to conduct `public inquiry' on racial issues that have cropped up or likely to surface and to take action to resolve them immediately."

Abdul Aziz said a Bill must be passed in Parliament for this purpose.

He said the present economic problems faced by Asean and Asian countries could also cause racial unrest here.

"We cannot resolve racial problems through police action and legislations ... such problems can only be tackled through consultations, discussions and a lot of tolerance."

Seripah Noli Syed Hussin (BN-Sepang) took to task private sector companies and corporations which had benefited when the economy was doing well but now placed more emphasis on engaging foreign workers instead of assisting the locals.

"I am not against the employment of foreign workers if the expertise cannot be found locally but there are too many instances where companies engaged foreign workers instead of locals and offered them attractive wages."

She said this was a reflection of the mentality of certain local companies which demonstrated a lack of patriotism.

On the present economic problems, she said, the problems involved everybody, irrespective of race, religion or even political parties, adding that political differences could cause further deterioration of the economy ... "that will be a sad day for the people."

Dr Tan Chong Keng (BN-Bukit Mertajam) urged the Government not to cut the budget for the Ministry of Education citing that education was the basis of building the people and the country.

He also called on the ministry to ensure proper planning when deploying newly trained teachers.

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