

27 MAR 1998

Anwar-temple

TEMPLE-NEXT-TO-MOSQUE ISSUE SETTLED, SAYS ANWAR

PULAU PINANG, March 27 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has warned parties trying to harp on the issue of temple-next-to-mosque in Kampung Rawa here that they would face stern government action.

"The issue is considered close," he said.

The government, he said, would not hesitate to take action against people who he branded as opportunists trying to capitalise on the issue.

Speaking to reporters here, Anwar said it was actually a small issue but was blown out of proportion by certain parties. "I therefore would like to strongly urge the local community not to entertain rumours, irresponsible and unfounded, and give a very stern, clear, stark warning that we will not tolerate any attempts to further aggravate the situation," Anwar said.

Anwar rushed here from Kulim, where he opened the Padang Serai Umno division delegates' meeting, upon being informed of a fight between a group from the mosque and another from the Raja-Raja Maduraiveeran temple.

Both places of worship stand next to each other in Jalan Petani here.

Anwar acknowledged there was tension and fighting between Malay and Indian youths resulting in some suffering light injuries.

"The matter has been settled wisely. Rumours have it that there was a major clash, there were fires," he said.

He categorically denied rumours of mosques and temples in Pulau Pinang being burnt or of high death toll and large casualties.

Members of the Press who were at the scene saw police firing tear gas and using water cannons to disperse a group of youths who gathered in front of the mosque after Friday prayers.

The youths turned violent and began throwing stones and missiles at the police.

Police later detained several youths for questioning.

"The matter has been settled by the state government and the police who acted fast and firmly to prevent the incident from spreading," he said.

Anwar said before rushing here he had discussed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad full disclosure of the incident leaving no room for misinterpretation.

The deputy prime minister also asked for cooperation from the opposition DAP and PAS not to politicise the incident.

He said this was a security issue and Malaysia has to preserve her record of racial peace and harmony.

"We would try our level best and take great pride in ensuring that there is continued peace and harmony and tolerance among the various communities and religions in this country.

"We should take great pride in that and do not allow any force, inside or outside, to provoke or to incite," said Anwar.

He said it was unfortunate that the problem was exaggerated and "forces outside this area had come in and continue to provoke and allowed the situation to aggravate with rumours of mosques being burnt and temples demolished."

"Both these claims are wrong. I also learnt that the foreign media had made out the situation as beyond control and that there were serious casualties," he said.

As for the background to the incident, Anwar said, what caused the

problem was the proximity of the temple to the mosque but the parties involved have already agreed to relocate the temple.

"I'm very pleased and record my thanks and appreciation to both the mosque committee of Kampung Rawa and the temple committee representing the Hindu community that they have decided to solve this tension and problem amicably with the assistance of the state government and police," he said.

The deputy prime minister said four of the youths involved the fight were reportedly injured.

Those detained by the police -- several Malay and Indian youths -- were being questioned, he said.

"I believe they would be released soon. They are being questioned to prevent spread of inciting lies and rumours," he said.

A Pulau Pinang Hospital spokesman said two persons have been warded there for further treatment.

Meanwhile in KUALA LUMPUR, MIC president Datuk Seri S.Samy Vellu thanked Anwar for taking the initiative to settle the problem.

Samy Vellu, who is Works Minister, said he was happy that Anwar's intervention has brought about an amicable solution to Kampung Rawa residents.

It was unfortunate that such an incident occurred, tarnishing the country's record of continuous religious harmony and racial co-existence, he told Bernama tonight.

He hoped all Malaysians would ensure there would be no further disruptions to that racial harmony.

Samy Vellu also thanked Pulau Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon for his part in defusing the tension arising from the issue. --

BERNAMA

AA ZU ES rn