

Suqiu's demands should be handled with care, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The demands by the Chinese Associations Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu) should be handled with care so that it will not be seen as favouring or hurting anyone, the Prime Minister said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in a situation when the Suqiu demanded that the special rights and privileges of the Malays be abolished, one could not urge the Malays to keep quiet.

"When Suqiu makes such a demand, we cannot control the Malays," he said when asked whether there was suspicion, between the Malays and Chinese following the demands made by Suqiu and the counter-demands by the Federation of Peninsular Malay Students Associations (GPMS).

Speaking during an exclusive interview with Bernama at Putrajaya on Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said he could not ask the Malays not to make counter-demands or voice objections to the Suqiu demands as this would be seen as favouring the Chinese.

"For instance if I were to tell the Malays not to make any demands I will become unpopular. It is enough that I have become unpopular with the Chinese who think I am hitting out at them, and after that should I go to the Malays and say do not do such things.

"So the Malays will see me to be on the side of the Chinese and the Chinese will say I am anti-Chinese. Hence we have to handle this matter with care," he said.

Last Sunday, Dr Mahathir had said that the Government totally rejected the Suqiu demand pertaining to the abolition of the special rights and privileges of the Malays as this was deemed extreme.

On Dec 11, the Prime Minister told the Dewan Rakyat that the Constitution of Malaysia and the social contract which formed the basis of the multiracial nation would have to be ignored if all 83 demands of the Suqiu were accepted by the Government.

Following the demands made by Suqiu, the GPMS made a 100-point counter-demand which included a call for the Constitution to be amended to provide only for a Malay to become Prime Minister of Malaysia.

On Opposition claims that the issue of the Suqiu demands was being played up by Umno to get support from the Malays, Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional and Umno were not that Machia-

vellian to urge Suqiu to make such demands.

"It is a ridiculous suggestion as if we have a conspiracy once more," he said, referring to the claim by Pas that Umno had staged the Al-Ma'unah incident in Perak last June.

In a light-hearted vein, Dr Mahathir said the BN and Umno were "not that efficient in this field" of deliberately instigating Suqiu to make demands which could hurt the feelings of the Malays.

He said Suqiu was in fact not aware of what it was demanding because recently it had stressed that it never demanded the special rights and privileges of the Malays be abolished.

"But the wording or the way they demanded implied as such (that the privileges be abolished) ... probably they do not understand what they are demanding.

"Hence to say that Umno had urged Suqiu on is a little bit too much ... we are unlikely to do that," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if the people would pay a high price if the matter was not handled well, Dr Mahathir said some people considered Suqiu's demands as moderate.

However to others, the call to abolish the special rights of the Malays was very dangerous and they were prepared to face any challenges, even chaos.

"They will blame Suqiu for asking such things," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked why the special rights and privileges of the Malays needed to be raised even though this was enshrined in the Constitution, Dr Mahathir said if the struggle for *merdeka* was studied they would surely honour the social contract among the various races in the country.

"But they are not looking at the profits they gained, only at the losses they incurred. These people do not realise that they had obtained something for themselves and then are making demands as though they want everything for themselves," he said.

He said these people were looking at only what others gained, and so there were these demands.

Dr Mahathir also rejected the assumption that Suqiu probably renewed its demands so as to make the Government "return" the solid support the Chinese voters gave to the BN in the general election last year.

"The Chinese supported the BN because we were able to solve the economic problems," he said.