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All-round support for DPM's call

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Various organisations, community leaders and politicians today came in support of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's clarion call that the different communities put an immediate halt to unreasonable demands.

They agreed with the Deputy Prime Minister that unity, which had been carefully nurtured for decades, should not be jeopardised by those seeking to advance their own interests.

Federation of Peninsular Malay Students (GPMS) president Datuk Suhaimi Ibrahim said today the movement accepted Abdullah's advice and expressed hope that other parties would also do so.

"We also want a peaceful and harmonious country. We strive to avoid tensions. But the question is whether Suqiu (Malaysian Chinese Organisations Election Appeals Committee) will also accept the advice," Suhaimi said, adding that Suqiu had yet to withdraw its demands.

He said GPMS wanted Suqiu to accept Abdullah's advice.

Suhaimi said the matter could be resolved if both sides withdrew their demands, adding that if Suqiu did not do so within a month, GPMS would go ahead with the proposed "Gathering of 100,000 Malays" at Bukit Jalil, which he said would be a show of Malay solidarity.

Yesterday, Abdullah urged leaders of different communities to "heal the fissures" by putting a halt to unbridled demands and political posturing before these result in a racial confrontation.

"Demands and counter-demands have been made. Demonstrations have been held and emotions have run high. This must all stop," Abdullah had said when opening the Sixth World Federation of Foochow Associations convention.

Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia president Tan Sri Chong Chin Shoong appealed to all leaders in the country that whatever was said should not damage the nation's racial harmony.

"We must exercise restraint in what we say and bear in mind that we must uphold the basic fundamental that we should avoid discussing sensitive issues in the open," Chong said.

Chong said democracy needed to be practised in a manner that did not have a negative effect on social discipline, racial harmony and political stability.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said all parties concerned should heed Abdullah's advice.

He said the advice was very good and timely and urged leaders of the different communities to put aside their differences and work for the betterment of the people.

"I think Abdullah's advice must be accepted by all groups who should take time to cool off.

"Their continued actions are detrimental to the country in that it could well scare off not only foreign investors but also locals who may choose to put their money in more peaceful countries," he said.

A member of the National Unity Advisory Panel, Datuk Lee Lam Thye, said the advice given by Abdullah was timely.

"It makes a lot of sense and should be heeded by all races. Every Malaysian who cares and loves this country should be committed to racial harmony," he said.

Chinwoo Federation of Malaysia president Chong Tho Chin said everyone

should "cool down".

Malaysian Youth Council president Saifuddin Abdullah said the council felt that the issue had been resolved with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that the Government could not accept Suqiu's demands as it was tantamount to abolishing Malay rights.

He said although the demands by a "part of the Chinese community" had not been retracted, it was the council's view that they (the demands) would fade away by themselves.

"With the condition that they are not harped on. If there is a need to discuss the demands, let it be done rationally, calmly and wisely.

"At the same time, Malays and Bumiputeras should not increase their special rights. Their special rights are protected by the Federal Constitution."

Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak said the Federal Constitution should be respected and excessive demands should not be made. "We should not demand anything (excessive). We have just experienced an economic downturn when 160,000 were retrenched."

In Penang, Gerakan national wanita chief Datuk Kee Phaik Cheen urged all parties to "ease off" from a public debate over Suqiu's requests.

She said an amicable solution on the issue could be achieved through constructive discussions.

In Ipoh, Barisan Nasional component parties in Perak lauded Abdullah's call. State Umno Youth chief Jamal Nasir Rasdi said racial demands should not be made into an issue which could be blown out of proportion.

He said what was demanded by racial groups should not even be considered as this would lead to demands from other groups.

Gerakan deputy secretary-general Datuk Chang Ko Youn said sensitive racial and religious issues should be discussed quietly through a proper forum and not in an open debate as now.

Open debates, he said, were bound to stir emotions and this could be exploited by certain irresponsible people.

"What we need to do now is concentrate our energy in helping the economy recover and not bicker over such issues."

In Seremban, Negri Sembilan Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Datuk Tan Kim Chong said community leaders, politicians and the media should stop making public any demands touching on racial issues.

He said such demands, in particular those made by Suqiu, should be discussed privately between the committee and the Government.

"The Government, which has its own policies with regard to such matters, can during the discussions, reject any demands it feels cannot be accepted.

"I support the call by Abdullah that these matters should not be thrown to the public view," Tan said.

Negri Sembilan Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Dr T.V.K. Balakrishnan said he supported Abdullah's call to put the issue to rest.

In Kuching, Sarawak National Party secretary-general Justine Jinggut said all communities should be willing to sacrifice for the sake of unity, saying that demands which were impossible to meet would lead to chaos.

"We cannot afford to see Malaysia, which has been enjoying stability and peace for over 40 years, be destroyed by such demands," he said.

Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak vice-president Peter Runin urged groups not to raise issues that could affect the nation's peace and prosperity.

"We have been living in peace all this while and so let's maintain it."

In Kota Kinabalu, Sabah Umno information chief Datuk Karim Ghani said racial unity was important for the nation.

"Everyone must contribute towards racial unity ... if not, we will all

be at the losing end. This is the only country we have and we must uphold unity," Karim said.

In Kuala Terengganu, Menteri Besar Abdul Hadi Awang said racial harmony was important to all races.

"We accepted this fact as tolerance of other races is called for by Islam. In fact, Islam has led a multi-racial society for over 1,900 years since the birth of the religion.

"We have also studied the country's history. Where Pas was strong, the racial riots of May 13 did not occur," he said.

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