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Effort needed `to bridge gap'

Cheah Chor Sooi in London

WHILE it is common to find inequality within a plural society, a concerted effort "to bridge the gap" is vital, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

He added the Government would continue to assume the task of restructuring the Malaysian society as an "affirmative action".

Speaking to a packed hall at the Malaysian Students Department on Sunday evening, he said: "We are very aware of the needs of the various communities as well as their sensitivities.

"Our main aim is to strive hard to achieve equality, but as usual, there are many areas that we have to cover or even to correct ourselves from time to time."

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, was earlier asked if he viewed the recent demands from the Malaysian Chinese Organisation Election Appeals Committee (Sugiu) as those of an extremist.

"I can assure you that we have sat down together to talk openly on those matters. Although it was behind closed doors, we did have an intense and heated debate.

"Even if someone has secretly recorded the proceeding, I dare him to expose the contents simply because I am proud of our continuous effort to impart fairness to all."

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said it was healthy for young people to have an inquisitive mind or to be critical, as long as they were matured enough to distinguish between right and wrong.

"Our Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) is very critical in his views to the extent that he was once expelled from Umno. He is still as critical as before, but (compared to his younger days) he is at a different level now. In other words, there is time to be anti-establishment, but there is also time to concentrate on your studies."

Abdullah, however, stressed that extremism, which would bring instability to the nation, should not be tolerated at all cost.

"If you ask me, my job as a Home Minister is much more challenging than my role as the Deputy Prime Minister. Law enforcement is not an easy job as one has to be responsible and accountable," he added.

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