

18/02/2003

Loyalty test for the Chinese

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THE Kung Ming sky lantern issue is a test of the loyalty of the Chinese community in the country, opined an academic in Berita Minggu.

In an article, Datuk Dr Firdaus Abdullah from Universiti Malaya's Faculty of Administration and Economy focused on the need and rationale of preserving the practice which originated 1,500 years ago in China.

He said there were five issues related to the practice - time and place, religion and culture, adherence to law, commercialism and responsibility of Chinese leaders.

The sky lanterns made headlines on Feb 8 when the release of thousands of them affected flights at the Bayan Lepas airport in Penang.

Firdaus said there was no need to "import" the culture in total from China because it was a homogenous society compared with Malaysia.

"The releasing of the lanterns is an added practice, without which Chap Goh Meh is still celebrated joyously.

The releasing of the lanterns involved safety, especially to aircraft and dwellings, thus the issue should not be exploited, he said.

The newspaper also reported some people flouting the ban announced by the Government.

In a random check on Saturday night, it said the lanterns were detected in areas such as Kepong and Jinjang, including Taman Nanyang, Kampung Baru Jinjang, Taman Daya, Taman Desa, Taman Bukit Maluri, Taman Selayang Utama and Taman Selayang Indah.

Utusan Malaysia also ran a similar story, with MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik blaming the flouting of the ban to lack of enforcement.

On politics, the proposal that the Umno general assembly in June be postponed till October gained momentum with more senior party leaders voicing their support.

In a front-page story yesterday, Utusan Malaysia carried a report quoting party information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob as saying that the matter would be raised by deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at the party's supreme council meeting on Feb 20.

Other party leaders said the council was empowered to decide the date of the assembly.

Describing it as a good proposal, vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said Umno had no problem considering matters that could benefit the party.

The matter was first raised by "Awang Selamat" in his Bisik-Bisik Mingguan column on Sunday, in which he proposed that the assembly be the last important function officiated by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as Prime Minister and Umno president.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar wrote to Mingguan Malaysia in response to comments made by "Awang Selamat" on the Press conference and "war of words" between Syed Hamid and Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar after the signing of the special agreement on Pulau Batu Puteh on Feb 6.

Clarifying, Syed Hamid said no Press conference had been scheduled after the signing to preserve the good ties between both sides, but Singapore wanted one be held. As it turned out later, Jayakumar had 25 reporters travelling with him and had prepared answers to the questions raised.

As the matter touched on Malaysia's integrity and sovereignty, Syed Hamid said he had to engage Jayakumar to set the record straight.

Berita Harian reported on Sunday the move by the Education Ministry to recall its teachers seconded to People's Religious Schools or SAR.

The teachers, according to Deputy Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin, would be absorbed into national schools.

The State with the highest number of seconded teachers was Kelantan, with 135.

Still on the SAR, Mingguan Malaysia called on the Government to take over such schools and not bow to pressure opposing the move.

It said this was one way to resolve the controversy, reminding readers that the Government did just that 26 years ago when it took over 11 SAR and turned them into federal religious schools.

Today, they are among schools with stellar academic results.

The newspaper also carried a letter from a reader who chided City Hall for being more interested in rhetoric than action in uplifting the image of Chow Kit.

He said the city had seen many Datuks Bandar come and go, but Chow Kit remained the same.

Khairuddin said temporary measures to beautify the area in conjunction with the Non-Aligned Movement Summit were not the answer.

What's needed, he said, was a long-term plan involving realistic and achievable physical changes.