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`Support peace rally'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Chinese community was urged today to support the Malaysians for Peace movement and attend the peace rally at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil on Feb 23.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said it was important for the community to express their full support for the movement against war by attending the rally.

"The Chinese community has so far given very strong support. A total of 568 Chinese associations, guilds and organisations gathered on Jan 30 and since then they have collected signatures at functions. At the moment, about 200,000 signatures have been collected in the country.

"About 150,000 have already been given to Peace Malaysia's secretariat, while 50,000 more signatures are on the way," he said.

"In a few days, this figure is bound to increase and this will contribute significantly to the target of one million signatures."

He was speaking after the distribution of Malaysia for Peace forms at Sekolah Menengah Confucian here today, where 1,500 signatures were collected.

"What is great about this campaign is that people from different races and religious backgrounds are coming together to support this peace movement. They sign without hesitation," he said.

He said Sekolah Menengah Confucian, along with other Chinese schools had already started its campaign to collect signatures and was confident that a total of 10,000 signatures could be collected from students, teachers and staff of these schools.

Peace Malaysia's rally with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be from 5pm to midnight.

On the proposed amendments to the Money-lenders Act 1951, Ong said the amendments were being examined by the Attorney-General's Chambers before they were presented to the Cabinet.

He said the proposed amendments would have provisions for harsher fines, imprisonment and caning for loan sharks, punishment for those who harassed and threatened borrowers as well emphasis on enforcement.

"This is one thing we are putting on top priority. We are trying our best to get the act ready for tabling in Parliament. Time is running short and this is quite tough but we will try."

Moneylending, under the Moneylenders Act 1951, is under the purview of the ministry, but local authorities are empowered to issue licences.