

Cool it, Najib advises BN members
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In an apparent move to appease simmering tension over controversial remarks by a BN parliamentarian, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today advised members to thread with caution.

"We would like to remind our members to not issue any statements that touch on sentiments of any race or anything that can cause problems between BN component parties," said Najib after chairing the BN supreme council meeting last night, without making any specific reference.

NONESri Gading Umno MP Mohamad Aziz (left) had courted controversy when he said the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan should be "hanged".

During the committee stage debate on the Supplementary Supply Bill in the House on Tuesday, Mohamad described Ambiga as a "traitor" and said she should be sent to the gallows for the "treasonous act" of organising the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28.

Mohamad had also likened Ambiga to the leaders of the Al-Ma'unah militant group which tried to overthrow the government in 2000 and were eventually sentenced to death by hanging for "waging war against the Agong", under the Section 122 of the Penal Code.

The impetuous statement landed him in hot water as opposition leaders and civil society groups lashed out at Mohamad for fanning racial and religious sentiments, saying that his remarks were aimed particularly at Ambiga "as she is a woman, a Hindu and Indian".

BN and Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor had released a statement soon afterwards distancing the party, saying that Mohamad's remarks were his "personal opinion" and that it is not the coalition's "stance".

MIC president G Palanivel warned that such statement would only ebb the support the ruling coalition had earned from the Indian community if left unchecked.

Mohamad, however, insisted that he had only posed it as a question, that "if" she could be punished for "treason" if she had committed an offence in organising the April 28 rally.

The four-term MP however, withdrew his statement officially in the House yesterday, upon instructions from deputy speaker Wan Junaidi Jaafar.

"I am a disciplined person. I am from a party that is disciplined. If my remark has hurt the feelings of my fellow leaders from MIC or PPP then in the spirit of BN fellowship, I retract my statement made on Tuesday," he had said.

Mandated to rule for five years

Meanwhile, when asked on opposition criticism that Najib was not confident in calling for the general election, he said: "That's is what the opposition says. We were elected by the people. We were elected for a period of five years."

"So in the five years we have to evaluate our strength in leading and governing our country, bringing progress and prioritising the people's welfare."

He said that by calling for elections before the end of the five year deadline on April 28 next year, the government will "shorten" the mandate entrusted.

"So there is no question of no confidence in facing the general election," he said.

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