

'No, no, no, Penang Umno not behind tensions'

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Penang Umno has released a series of denials that it is behind several tense situations that took place in the state over the past week, but expressed empathy with those involved in the incidents.

The party denied organising two rallies in Seberang Jaya and Alma, saying it was not responsible for the banner 'Because of DAP leaders' mouths, May 13 happened... want some more?' displayed at the first event on Jan 18, nor was it part of the violence during the second rally on Jan 19.

In a press conference held in Penang yesterday evening, state Umno chairperson Zainal Abidin Osman claimed the rallies were a response to the 'I Love Kangkung' flash mob organised by PKR Machang Bubuk assemblyperson Lee Khai Loon on Jan 17, which he said was insulting to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

"The two rallies last week would not have happened if the flash mob to insult the PM had not taken place. It was a provocative action that invited a response," said Zainal, the former Nibong Tebal MP.

"We understand the feelings and grievances of those who carried the banner as all these years they have felt oppressed, insulted, not defended or treated well by the elected DAP government," he said.

"Umno leaders joined the rallies in their capacities as local leaders. It would not be appropriate for them not to be with the rakyat to show their support for Najib," Zainal explained.

He was referring to Kepala Batas MP Reezal Merican Naina Merican and state Umno secretary Musa Sheikh Fadzir who, among others, attended the rally with Perkasa and Pekida members.

"Umno leaders and members also have the right to express their views. This right is not exclusive only to DAP, PAS and PKR or their NGO allies," Zainal said.

Lee denied insulting Najib, but criticised the PM's speech in Kemaman on Jan 12, as many quarters did, where he used the popular local vegetable to illustrate how the cost of daily goods are controlled by market forces.

But Najib's supporters were not amused by Lee's act of feeding a replica of Najib with kangkung, unlike his comrades who held two other similar flash mobs around the Bayan Baru and Seberang Jaya areas.

Zainal said Umno members express their views whenever Malay or Muslim interests were challenged and when their leaders and party are chided and insulted.

He expressed confidence in the police, that they would conduct their work fairly and professionally as they have also begun probing Umno members over the two rallies.

'Peace for 34 years in the state'

Noting that Umno has 200,000 members in Penang, Zainal reminded the party's rivals that the country enjoyed peace for 34 years in the state during BN's rule from 1974 until 2008, before Pakatan Rakyat came to power in the March 8, 2008 general election.

He urged the state government led by Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng not to "poison" the minds of the people, or make them hate Umno, resulting in "tension, or an uncontrollable situation".

"We reject any attempts to spark racial tension, as DAP and Pakatan leaders continue to fan the fires since 2008," he claimed.

Over the week, Umno supporters were also accused of being involved in a scuffle between some local groups and civil servants from the District Office and Penang Municipal Council officers who were on an anti-illegal hawkers operations in Teluk Bahang.

During the incident, Southwest District assistant district officer Abu Hassan Osman was assaulted and his shirt torn off by the angry mob in front of 35 policemen.

Umno, Perkasa and Pekida members were present to defend the hawkers, while police have remanded seven men who were involved in the scuffle.

The incident prompted the state government to hold an emergency meeting on safety and security of Penangites with all Pakatan reps in Komtar last Friday.

"We have identified and listed 22 areas where stalls owned by bumiputera hawkers were demolished and were given notice that they would be demolished since 2010," Zainal said.

He urged the state to relocate the hawkers to a proper place while the party plans to seek federal allocation to assist those involved.

"Please be more sensitive and considerate when demolishing these stalls as the hawkers rely on them for their livelihood," Zainal added.

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