

Zahid: I didn't mean to hurt non-bumi feelings
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 8, 2010

Defence Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has offered a qualified explanation of his recent remark about the lack of 'strong patriotism' among non-bumiputeras, but stopped short of issuing an apology.

NONEZahid (left) rose in the Dewan Rakyat today to explain his remark made on Nov 9 when he had attempted to explain the low level of involvement of non-bumiputeras in the armed forces.

"I feel that it is unfortunate if my answer to the House has hurt the feelings of any race," he said.

"History has shown that many of the nation's heroes who had fought against the colonisers and the communist insurgents - Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Ibans, Dayak and Eurasians and others - (were) sacrificed for the country.

"I did not mean to hurt the feelings of the non-bumiputera community. It was also not my intention to dispute the patriotism of the non-bumiputera community."

He also said he regrets that his statement had offended the public.

When M Kulasegaran (DAP-Ipoh Barat) interjected, urging the minister to issue a direct apology, Zahid ignored him.

Deputy speaker Ronald Kiandee said no one is allowed to interrupt the minister's explanation.

'Let's work together'

Zahid then called on all leaders of political parties, NGOs and community groups, as well as youth leaders, to work together to expand the number of the non-bumiputeras in the armed forces.

"And let us stand together to uphold the principles of '1Malaysia', initiated by the prime minister," he added.

In his original remarks, Zahid had attributed the low number of Chinese and Indian recruits in the military to "lack of patriotism", and "the fear of tough military discipline, low pay compared to private jobs or no encouragement from families".

Kulasegaran has filed a motion to dock RM10 from the minister's salary, saying the remarks were "insensitive and baseless".

This is scheduled to be debated next week.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/150239>

