

PM orders stop on tiff over race issues
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi urged Malaysians to stop discussing race and religious issues after a dispute over comments by a leader from his Umno party.

His comments come after Ahmad Ismail, the Bukit Bendera division chief in Penang, allegedly claimed the Chinese were "squatters" in the country.

ahmad ismail bukit bendera umno penang racist cina tumpang 050908 03Ahmad (photo, left) was said to have made the statement two weeks ago while campaigning for a government candidate in a hotly contested by-election that returned opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim to parliament after a 10-year absence.

"We do not want chaos in our country. If there is chaos, no one will win. Everyone will lose and the country will face problems," Abdullah was quoted as saying in a banner headline on the front page of The New Straits Times daily.

"Things that should not have been raised and sensitive things have surfaced. This has caused anger among the various races who feel their rights and sensitivities have been overlooked or ignored," he added.

abdullah ahmad badawi maha agriculture exposition 120808 02Abdullah said talk on issues such as race and religion could lead to disharmony, referring to an unwritten pact upon independence between the various races that ensures special privileges for the Malays in exchange for citizenship for Chinese and Indians.

Refused to apologise

Ahmad has refused to apologise over the comment, saying he was misinterpreted and was referring to historical events, but it provoked a sharp response from within the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, which includes Chinese and Indian component parties.

Abdullah did not touch on his earlier advice to Ahmad to apologise after all Umno divisions in his home state of Penang openly backed the Bukit Bendera Umno chief.

On Saturday, a state youth wing of the Malaysian Chinese Association, the main Chinese party in the BN, urged it to consider leaving the coalition if Umno leaders refused to change their attitude.

Opposition leaders have also questioned Ahmad's claim, saying it took 11 days before the politician denied the allegation.

"Anyone who had been wrongly maligned or subject of a false accusation would ... make an instant response," Lim Kit Siang, a senior leader in the Pakatan Rakyat opposition alliance, said in a statement.