

PM rebukes Hindraf over noisy Raya visit
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Fauwaz Abdul Aziz

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi expressed 'disappointment' with the manner in which Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) activists 'visited' the ministerial Hari Raya 'open house' last Wednesday.

Instead of extending greetings to the hosts and other guests and acting in "the spirit of Hari Raya", Abdullah suggested that the activists had abused their admission and caused "a lot of unhappiness" among those present.

"I feel disappointed, actually," he told a press conference after chairing a meeting with members of the International Advisory Panel to the Malaysia Biotechnology Corporation at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre today.

pm open house 011008 small hindraf Abdullah said that, as the host, he had allowed about 200 Hindraf activists into the event at Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, as such occasions are meant for both Muslims and non-Muslims to celebrate.

"We don't prevent any group from coming to our open house, to wish Selamat Hari Raya, and to mix with other guests. This is the spirit of Hari Raya," he said.

"Why should I prevent Malaysians from coming to our open house? It's open for everybody, even tourists and non-Malaysians who came in big numbers."

However, he said the activists' entry into the hall where the main reception was held was accompanied by "a lot of noise", due in part to their sloganeering over the Internal Security Act (ISA) and demands for the release of their leaders currently being detained.

pm open house 011008 09 wondering in banquet hall

"What I was told by someone who was observing ... behind me, was 'Pak Lah, did you realise that only one of them said Selamat Hari Raya to you?'," said Abdullah, adding that they had failed to shake hands even with other cabinet ministers.

"The rest (of their words), which I heard very clearly, was, 'Abolish the ISA! Free the Hindraf! Abolish the ISA! Free the Hindraf!' That's all they wanted to tell me. This is not the spirit of Hari Raya, where you wish (Selamat) Hari Raya, are happy and have fun and socialise."

Action 'won't be taken'

Abdullah said the Hindraf crowd created "a lot of unhappiness to a lot of people who were around".

He said, however, that "there is no report (to warrant) severe action" against the activists for their conduct.

Hindraf has since lodged police reports against Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar,

Malay-language daily Utusan Malaysia and several Malay-based NGOs over 'false allegations and reports' on the event.

p waytha moorthyEarlier today, Hindraf chairperson P Waythamoorthy had issued a statement in which he took to task Utusan Malaysia and private television station TV3 for 'biased and invalidated' reporting.

"This was a clear to invoke racial tension," said Waythamoorthy, who is in self-imposed exile in the UK.

He also noted that Hindraf's previous pleas for a dialogue with the prime minister have fallen on deaf ears.

"The open house is the only day in the year a commoner can make the acquaintance of the PM personally and Hindraf took the liberty to send a clear message - release all prisoners held unjustly without trial, in spirit of forgiveness," he added.

Five Hindraf leaders, including his brother Uthayakumar, were detained under the ISA on Dec 13 last year after organising a mammoth rally in Kuala Lumpur on Nov 25. This saw some 30,000 Indian Malaysians protesting against perceived marginalisation and discrimination.

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