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Abdullah: Regain close communal bonds of 1957

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians should return to the spirit of 1957, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, when the bonds between the three main communities were at their most potent.

"The British could not do anything but step down when they saw how united and strong the Malays, Chinese and Indians were. We had one goal — to achieve Merdeka," the prime minister told the MCA general assembly here.

"We have to return to and regain that same spirit of understanding and togetherness for our 50th year of independence."

Many challenges had been faced since, with more to come, making it essential that the sense of unity and togetherness of the nation's founding be revived, he said.

"Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Tun V.T. Sambathan were united because they knew they had to work closely in the best interests of the country.

"This was when ties between the three main races were at their closest," he said.

Abdullah related the story of a meeting between Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tan and leaders of the Chinese community at the onset of negotiations with the colonial power.

"Tunku had just told Tan he wanted to go to London to discuss the terms of independence with the British when the Chinese lead-



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi receiving a standing ovation from the audience at the MCA annual general assembly yesterday. On the left is Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.

ers present began emptying their pockets.

"They handed over their money, rings and watches to Tunku and told him they wanted to help finance his trip to London.

"That was how united they were and how much they were willing to sacrifice in the name of liberty."

Speaking to the 1,738 delegates of the 54th annual party assembly at Wisma MCA yesterday, Abdullah stressed that Barisan Nasional's strength depended on the combined might of the component parties.

"If the component parties are

weak, we will lose out in the future. Component parties must be sensitive to and respect each other."

In standing for their individual causes, community leaders must not practise discrimination, he said.

"Those who discriminate are unworthy of being leaders. True patriots are those who consider the needs and feelings of others without discriminating."

Abdullah's speech, which was off-the-cuff, was well received from the audience, which included other BN component party leaders and former MCA leaders.

At the close of his 45-minute speech, Abdullah replied to MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, who had spoken earlier on the fraternal principles required for the ruling coalition to endure for the next half century.

"On the issue of power-sharing, I have been fair, I want to be fair and I'll always be fair.

"BN will stay on not for another 50 years, Ka Ting, but for more than 100 years. We will always stay together," he said to loud applause.

Abdullah was given a standing ovation as he returned to his seat.