

PM: We must unite or we'll face a bleak future

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KUALA LUMPUR: It was an emotional speech, one that came from the heart and brought tears to the eyes of several people.

Setting his prepared speech aside, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi chose to speak off the cuff at the trade launch of the 50th Merdeka celebrations last night.

The Prime Minister said he would speak frankly, which he did.

And it clicked with the audience — they sat in rapt attention as he spoke for 30 minutes on the pre-Merdeka era, the days before independence, the May 13 incident and of present times.

Admitting that race relations were still fragile and brittle, Abdullah urged all Malaysians to mend fences and unite, or the country would face a bleak future.

The launch, organised by Media Prima Bhd, was attended by some 200 people.

Abdullah said while the Malays were the driving force behind the push for independence, they decided to work with the Chinese and Indians as they realised that such a co-operation would ensure victory.

"This was sound thinking because the British adopted a divide-and-rule policy.

"The rebellion of the Straits Chinese was the signal that the push for independence was for all races.

"I still remember the independence movement, although I was only a schoolboy then.

"We were united. On the eve of Merdeka, all waited for midnight for the Union Jack to be lowered and the Malayan flag to be hoisted."

On Merdeka Day, Abdullah recalled greetings of good morning or good afternoon were replaced with shouts of "Merdeka".

Touching on race relations, he

said things were good until tensions began to surface which culminated in the May 13 racial riot.

"It is not something I will ever forget. But after that, it (relations) became better. These days, I know things are not good. It is still fragile. It is still brittle.

"Why do we need to fight? Is it not better to work together for our future?" he asked the audience.

Abdullah said history was a good teacher and Malaysians should learn from what had happened in the past in order to move forward.

"We need to identify our strengths and weaknesses. One weakness that we have is that the present generation does not share the spirit of independence."

Abdullah said the young gener-

ation were like children born into wealth who could not understand their parents' struggles because they had air-conditioned houses and were chauffeured around in big cars.

"Today, things are easy, and how easy it is to forget the struggles and perseverance of their parents so that their children and grandchildren would have a comfortable life.

"If we forget history, then we cannot learn and move forward. Let's hope that does not happen," he said.

Abdullah hoped the activities planned for next year in conjunction with the 50th Merdeka celebrations would include programmes to educate the people, especially the post-independence

generation, on the nation's struggles.

"Enlighten them on what our forefathers went through and how we got to where we are now, not just where we want to go. Let history be our teacher," he said.

Concluding, the Prime Minister again touched on racial unity, urging everyone to unite.

"What we want to achieve can only be realised through the efforts of all Malaysians, not just a select race.

"I do not want only one race to celebrate (Merdeka) because they are the only ones who feel the spirit. All races must celebrate.

"We must eliminate all negative feelings towards each other.

"We must unite as Malaysians to take on the world."