

# PM's assurance a boost to racial harmony

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**KOTA MARUDU:** Racial unity in the country will be strengthened with the guarantee from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that Umno will always be fair to all races.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Maximus Ongkili said the statement by Abdullah as Umno president was reassuring and in line with the Barisan Nasional power-sharing policy.

He said that heated debates were normal in political party meetings but that Malaysians in general prioritised national unity above all else.

"Sometimes it is hard to control our feelings when it comes to racial or political issues but that is our challenge and we will overcome it with maturity.

"At the same time, we must remember that the most important thing is not to offend other people's feelings."

Maximus, who was attending the Maize Fest here yesterday, said that Abdullah's speech at the close of the Umno general assembly reassured all Malaysians that the party is looking out for everyone's interests as well.

Maximus, who is the minister in charge of national unity, did not deny the possibility of opposition parties who will try to look for opportunities where they can exploit the government.

"But the people in urban and rural areas are smart and can make their own judgment. So we are confident that any effort to bring down our country's unity will fail dismally," he said.

Meanwhile, in Kuching, the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) has expressed its relief over Abdullah's speech.

"The prime minister has spoken for all Malaysians and we are in full support of his winding-up speech," SUPP secretary-general Datuk Sim Kheng Hui said yesterday.

Abdullah, who is also Umno president, had assured that there was no reason for Umno to sideline any race and that the party must be responsible for not only the Malay race but also the other races who had accepted its leadership.

He had also said that Umno must never forget the rights of other races under the Federal Constitution.