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PM: Don't turn it all into racial, religious issues

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tell the truth, even if it hurts.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called on politicians and community leaders to face up to racial and religious issues in a serious and honest manner.

The prime minister wanted leaders, especially those in Barisan Nasional, to tell him the facts about those issues without sugar-coating them.

He said Malaysia's success did not come easily despite many believing otherwise.

"If you think that this is an excellent achievement, I thank you," he said when opening the Gerakan national delegates conference at Menara PGRM here yesterday.

"But I must stress that it hasn't been without problems. We still have problems today that we have to manage all the time."

He said the country would not be as successful if racial and religious issues were not addressed.

"We do not want to pretend and say that everything is okay. We do not want to be in a state of denial. Tell the truth, even if it is painful."

"The prime minister must have the courage and readiness to listen even to the worst stories, whether it is related to the country or himself. Never allow yourself to sink in a hole of denial and feel that everything is alright."

Abdullah said his counterparts from other countries had often conveyed their admiration for the "Malaysian miracle" of having achieved religious tolerance and racial unity.

Although happy with their compliments, he said he never hesitated to tell them of the country's share of problems on the road to harmony. While the truth must be told, he advised Malaysians not to react negatively whenever a religious or racial issue cropped up.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, flanked by Penang Chief Minister and acting Gerakan president Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon (left) and former Penang Chief Minister Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu, sharing a laugh at the Gerakan national delegates conference yesterday. — Picture by Ghazali Bujang

He criticised those who were trapped in the mindset of turning everything into a racial or religious issue.

"We respond readily when there is something that we perceive to be a racial issue. We respond quickly when someone we do not like brings these matters up. This makes the issue more complicated and harder to resolve."

However, Abdullah said the BN had gone through such experiences before and knew what to expect.

"We have been solving one racial issue after another. We have

even been on the brink of disaster."

Such issues, he added, had to be dealt with through discussions to decide on the best approach to take.

Racial and religious issues were also brought up at MCA and MIC general assemblies but the prime minister explained that he had always been consistent in his stand.

"I know, you know that I have never been inconsistent. I am firm in my stand. We have been entrusted to lead at the national level. Our duty is to all citizens regardless of race," he said to thunderous applause.

Abdullah, who is the BN chairman, reminded the component parties not to fall into the trap of championing only the rights of their own party and ignoring others.

Each race is entitled to a slice of the country's economic cake, he said, adding that the nation's wealth must be distributed fairly among those who worked for it.

Quoting the Gerakan slogan, "Satu Hati", he said Malaysia could truly become a strong, competitive country if the people were united with one heart.