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'Social contract debate will create animosity'

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PUTRAJAYA: The Barisan Nasional government respects the social contract which has made the country politically and economically viable since independence 50 years ago, the prime minister said.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said there was no need for it to be debated.

"There will be all kinds of reaction from the Malays. It will only create animosity and lead to unwarranted and tense situations.

"I guarantee that the Malays do not like this to be discussed," he said in reference to a forum on the social contract organised on Saturday by the Bar Council in Kuala Lumpur.

It was reported that the forum, comprising lawyer Tommy Thomas, academic Dr Mavis Puthuchery and political analysts Dr Kua Kia Soong and Dr Farish Noor, discussed Article 153 of the Federal Constitution in relation to Malay rights.

Abdullah said the social contract, agreed upon by the country's founding fathers, had made the country stable.

"We fully understand it and what we have implemented the past 50 years is based on the social contract. Our country has been harmonious socially, politically and economically.

"We continue to achieve progress as there is no group or quarter who politicises the issue. We are a responsible government and our members are from all BN component parties.

"Consensus has always been our hallmark and we always advise each other on what needs to be done. BN leaders fully understand what our past leaders had agreed upon as contained in the Constitution."

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam had said the forum was part of the council's move to suppress and discredit the Malays and Islam.

"They forget that the Malays formed the majority before the country achieved independence and after independence the Malays agreed to share power," Ali said.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein on Saturday described the forum as an "unhealthy" development.

He said the social contract on the position and rights of the Malays was an historical fact.

In Kota Tinggi yesterday, Home Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said action could be taken against the Bar Council for holding

the forum, if anyone who attended the event files a police report.

The police, he said, could begin investigations if a report was lodged against the Bar Council for sedition.

"We (the ministry) cannot initiate such action, but in the event a report is filed by anyone who attended the forum, it could lead to other things, particularly if evidence is provided on the forum," said Syed Hamid, who is also an Umno supreme council member.