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'This should not have happened'

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LOW YAT FRACAS:

A crime became a racially charged situation, says Najib

KUALA LUMPUR

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday urged Malaysians not to give in to mob mentality in the wake of a riot at Plaza Low Yat here on Sunday.

The public, he said, should remain calm and let the authorities carry out proper investigations into the riot, which was sparked after a theft and fighting at the plaza on Saturday.

"Don't give in to mob psychology. When something happens, don't follow blindly without knowing all the facts," he said here.

Fighting broke out on Saturday after two men were caught for stealing a mobile phone from a shop at the plaza, causing an uproar on social media due to rumours that the incident had been racially motivated.

Mob violence followed on Sunday night, with 19 people arrested

in connection with the incident.

Najib said the matter should have been seen as a criminal act rather than a problem of worsening race relations.

"In these instances, it is easy to see things from the perspective of race.

"A crime became a racially charged situation, which should not have happened."

He branded those who spread inaccurate facts on social media as "irresponsible" and called on police to investigate the circulation of false news online.

"There were many pictures uploaded on to the Internet which had no relevance to the incident whatsoever.

"People should not be so quick to accept what they see or read on social media.

"Don't be so easily fooled. Stay calm and let the authorities deal with the situation."

He said there was a need to review whether there was too much freedom on social media, in response to a question on whether the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission had reacted too slowly to the incident.

"Right now, we have freedom

on social media. Perhaps there is too much freedom. This is something we should be studying in detail."

He said this after distributing RM200 in cash as well as food packs to more than 300 homeless people at a temporary service centre for the homeless near Jalan Sultan Ismail.

Later, on his Facebook page, Najib said he had instructed Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar to take the necessary steps to prevent a repeat of the

Plaza Low Yat incident.

MCA secretary-general Datuk Seri Ong Ka Chuan said it was disturbing that a criminal case could incite racially-charged rumours and statements on social media.

"We urge members of the public to stop spreading, distributing and sharing the related videos, pictures and unverified news to avoid falling into the trap set by irresponsible quarters with unknown motives and intention."

MCA Youth chief Chong Sin

Woon said police needed to ensure that no more illegal gatherings took place.

He said action must be taken on those who attacked reporters and members of the public on Sunday night, stating that there were enough photographs, videos and closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage as evidence.

Page 1 pic: Federal Reserve Unit personnel standing guard around Jalan Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur yesterday morning.