

Guan Eng says Umno attacks sparked arson attempts
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By Clara Chooi

PUTRAJAYA, Aug 18 — Lim Guan Eng appeared today to blame Umno for escalating religious tension that led to this morning's arson attempt on the DAP's Penang headquarters, and demanded "forceful" action from the police against the perpetrators.

"We felt that this was one of those attacks by Umno on the recital of the Quran issue," he told reporters today when met at the sidelines of the National Finance Council meeting here.

Lim (picture) was referring to the controversial edict by the Penang Fatwa Council banning the use of loudspeakers for reciting verses from the Quran before dawn prayers.

The ban had caused a furore among the Muslim community in Penang and earned much criticism in the Umno-controlled media with political leaders claiming this as evidence that the DAP-led state government was impinging on the rights of Muslims.

Early this morning, the DAP's Penang headquarters in Jalan Talipon was discovered partly charred after an unknown man was purportedly seen leaving a stack of burning newspapers in front of its premises.

DAP leaders have linked the attack to the ban, saying this is the second incident since the controversy hit the headlines. The first attack occurred four days ago when red paint was splashed at the same premises and at DAP assemblyman Ng Wei Aik's office.

The Penang chief minister however continued to insist today that the ban had not been made by the state government but by Penang Mufti Datuk Seri Hassan Ahmad, who had himself made the same admission.

"The mufti had already clarified that we weren't involved, it was decided by the fatwa committee without any instruction or interference by the state government," he said.

Calling the attack "irresponsible and barbaric", Lim also expressed fear that allowing the arson culprits to go scot-free would encourage more violence in the future.

"It is a dangerous escalation towards violence and if left unchecked, this will make a functioning democracy not a contest of ideas and principles but a contest of violence.

"I hope the police can act forcefully to nab those responsible. Act without fear or favour," he said.

Lim pointed out that the police had not shied away from using force against protesters during the Bersih 2.0 on July 9.

"When democratic rallies are held asking for free and fair polls, they are harshly treated and beaten up," he said.

Lim added that when pro-Barisan Nasional (BN) rallies are held, no action is usually taken against the rally organisers, thus encouraging them to act violently.

"Look at the pro-BN protest blocking the Penang Bridge recently... 10km of traffic was

caused and even reporters were beaten but you don't see action against Umno. This gives encouragement for violent actions," he said.

Lim added that he had conveyed the matter to Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein through an aide this morning, urging him to take immediate action.

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