

Don't hurt other races, Najib tells BN members
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, June 29 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak has called on his Barisan Nasional (BN) that is spearheaded by race-based parties not to raise the temperature of communal relations, as he seeks to shore up non-Malay support for a general election that must be held within a year.

The Umno president's call comes just days after one of his MPs, Datuk Mohamad Aziz, likened Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan to a member of militant group al-Ma'unah and asked in Parliament why the Bersih chief should not be considered a traitor and hung for organising the April 28 rally for free and fair elections.

The lawmaker's remark drew the reproach of the opposition, who accused him of targeting Ambiga because of her race and religion.

"We will continue these efforts and remind members not to make statements that will hurt the feelings of other races or BN component parties," the prime minister said after chairing a BN supreme council meeting, referring to welfare programmes under his 1 Malaysia slogan.

Mohamad, who is Sri Gading MP, yesterday withdrew his remarks asking if Ambiga should be hanged for treason after he was ordered to do so by Dewan Rakyat Deputy Speaker Datuk Dr Wan Junaidi Jaafar.

"I am a disciplined citizen. My party is disciplined. If my remarks hurt my friends, the Indians, MIC, PPP, and affect the spirit of understanding in BN, I withdraw what I said on June 26," the four-term federal lawmaker said.

But before agreeing to retract his words, the Sri Gading MP first launched into a biting attack against the DAP, calling the party "racist" and accusing DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng of spinning his words out of context.

According to Hansard, the Umno leader had on Tuesday night said in the House: "Kita masih ingat apabila al-Maunnah menderhaka kepada Yang di-Pertuan Agong, kita hukum gantung dia. Ingat cerita itu beberapa tahun yang lalu? Apakah Ambiga tidak boleh kita anggap penderhaka kepada Duli Yang Maha Mulia Yang di-Pertuan Agong dan hukum gantung pada dia?"

(Translation: We still remember when al-Ma'unah committed treason against the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, we hanged them. Remember that incident several years ago? Can we not consider Ambiga a traitor to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and sentence her to hang?)

Najib has also accused Bersih of an attempted coup and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein has said there were elements in the rally who wanted to instigate death and bloodshed.

The government has set up a panel to investigate the April 28 violence, but the choice of former police chief Tun Hanif Omar, as panel head, has been widely criticised after he

compared the movement to communism and accused the organisers of trying to overthrow the government.

The April 28 rally that saw tens of thousands gather at six different locations before heading to Dataran Merdeka was peaceful until about 2.30pm when Ambiga asked the crowd to disperse.

But her announcement was not heard by most of the crowd who persisted to linger around the historic square which the court had already barred to the public over the weekend.

Just before 3pm, some protestors breached the barricade surrounding the landmark, leading police to disperse the crowd with tear gas and water cannons.

Police then continued to pursue rally-goers down several streets amid chaotic scenes which saw violence from both sides over the next four hours.

Several dozen demonstrators have claimed that they were assaulted by groups of over 10 policemen at a time and visual evidence appears to back their claim but police also point to violence from rally-goers who attacked a police car.

The Al-Ma'unah group had audaciously stolen weapons from an army camp in July 2000 before finally being cornered and forced to surrender in Sauk, Perak.

Mohamed Amin Mohamed Razali, who led the band of 29 men, was hanged six years later, followed by three other leaders of the terrorist group.

Prior to an earlier Bersih rally held on July 9 last year, a group of Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) activists were also arrested on suspicion of planning to wage war on the King.

The move gained widespread condemnation and the last batch of six PSM leaders were only freed from detention 28 days later before being charged for subversion just days later.

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