

NATIONAL DAY A GOOD DAY TO SHOW OFF SENSE OF ONENESS

BY ADIB POVERA - 31 AUGUST 2016 @ 11:01 AM

There was a surge of anticipation among reporters when they saw Tan Sri Adenan Satem making his way to the VIP room at the Kuching International Airport on Saturday.

The Sarawak chief minister and his entourage had just returned from Putrajaya after a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak over the impasse between the state and Petronas.

The meeting, to discuss the moratorium on application for new working permits for non-Sarawak Petronas workers, was attended by the national oil giant's chief executive officer, Datuk Wan Zulkiflee Wan Ariffin. While Adenan usually looks serious, there was something about him that gave an indication that the problem had been resolved.

The meeting was fruitful, said Adenan, with both parties reaching an amicable solution to the problem, which was triggered by allegations that Petronas had neglected the welfare of Sarawakians during its group-wide restructuring. The issue, which went on for weeks, ended with Petronas agreeing to implement seven steps, including the appointment of a state secretary to its Board of Directors, representing the voice of Sarawakians.

The state government agreed to review the ban on most new working-permit applications by non-Sarawak Petronas workers, which were frozen in the wake of the allegation. Since the case was highlighted, Petronas had had its operations scrutinised, to the extent that it was accused of attempting to evade Immigration checks.

Adenan and his state administration were also not spared claims by quarters trying to heighten the tension between Sarawak and Petronas. There were allegations on social media that the moratorium was the outcome of talks on devolution between the Federal Government and the state government and that the latter was asking for too much.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nancy Shukri, who is also Batang Sadong member of parliament, said: "The decision to impose the moratorium was solely an action enforced by a responsible state government to protect the interest of the people.

"It has nothing to do with talks on devolution of power since negotiation (for the second phase of discussions) is ongoing." Nancy and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman are the ministers tasked by the Federal Government to oversee negotiations on the devolution of powers. Even when the state government had started efforts to seek greater autonomy for Sarawak, there were quarters saying the move would create regional sentiments among the people. Adenan said recently:

"The state government was only claiming our rights as enshrined in the Federal Constitution and Malaysia Agreement, which was signed in 1963. Some of these aspects (autonomy) have been

forgotten.” With most of the issues having been resolved, today’s National Day celebration will be a good start to prove to detractors that national integration among people from all states is strong and intact.

The unity among the people, including those from Sarawak and Sabah, should continue to be strengthened by addressing people’s problems.

Political analyst Associate Professor Dr Jeniri Amir of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak said: “It is undeniable that the Federal Government has done its best to meet the aspirations of the people in Sarawak, and this is reflected in a number of development programmes that will benefit the Land of the Hornbills.

“However, I believe that there is always room for improvement. “Perhaps, more jobs should be given to the people of Sarawak.” Adib Povera, born in Kuala Lumpur, raised in Perak, is NST’s Sarawak bureau chief. A nature lover, he never tires of discovering new sights in the Land of the Hornbills

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