

PM: Racial harmony key to stable future

KOTA KINABALU, Tues. — Racial disputes and communal strife in a multi-racial country do not bring benefits to anyone but will only lead to its destruction. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that in racial conflicts, it was the minority groups that always suffered.

This was evident in several countries around the world such as Northern Ireland, India, Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda where the people were torn apart by communal or religious conflicts.

"Malaysia, however, is fortunate that the various communities are able to live together in peace, unity and harmony.

"Foreigners are amazed to see the camaraderie among Malaysians and the way they join in the festive occasions of the various communities. Whether it is a New Year celebration or a religious festival, all the communities participate in the celebration with open houses and togetherness.

"Such a practice cannot be seen in other countries," he said when closing the two-day *Kaamatan* or Harvest Festival in Penampang,

near here, today.

Dr Mahathir said that in some countries the multi-racial population had been in conflict over many years, resulting in the deaths of many innocent people.

He said that in Bosnia more than 200,000 people had died at the hands of the Serbs while in Rwanda the tally was more than 500,000.

"Rwanda's neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, have problems disposing of the bodies that are washed onto their shores."

Dr Mahathir said the two main warring tribes in Rwanda had been kept apart when the country was under Belgian colonial rule.

"Following independence and the pullout of Belgian troops, even the missionaries and Red Cross personnel have become victims of the warring factions."

He said the Serbs even attacked, killed and tortured innocent people in Goradze, which was considered a UN safe haven.

"The UN troops pulled out and the people were left to the mercy of the Serbs.

"This goes to show that developing nations cannot depend on developed nations or outsiders to solve their problems!"

multi-racial nations could not expect outside help in finding solutions to their problems.

He said celebrations such as the *Kaamatan* festival could help foster goodwill and solidarity among the people and help instil the "culture of harmony".

Dr Mahathir said people could have different political ideologies and religious beliefs and this was possible in a democratic country like Malaysia.

"But only if we have peace and harmony can we concentrate on development."

He also said pledges made by the Barisan Nasional during the recent State election would be fulfilled.

Also present was his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Chief Minister Tan Sri Sakaran Dandai and Federal and State Cabinet Ministers.

A heavy downpour did not dampen the festivities and over 4,000 people converged at the Hongkod Kois-san, where the celebrations were held. The highlight of the occasion was a *Unduk Ngadau* (a Harvest Beauty Queen contest).

The State-level *Kaamatan* festival is the culmination of a month-long celebration.