

Dr M: National unity key to peace, prosperity

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — National unity and understanding among the people have contributed towards the country's peace and stability and helped in efforts to strengthen economic growth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that based on the economic performance in the first half of this year and the bright outlook for the coming months, the country was expected to see another outstanding year.

"The country's economy is estimated to achieve an 8.5 per cent growth this year," he said in his congratulatory address and pledge of loyalty on behalf of the Government and the people at the installation ceremony of Tuanku Ja'afar Ibni Almarhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman as the 10th Yang di-Pertuan Agong at Istana Negara.

The Prime Minister's address covered a wide range of topics: from religion and racial harmony to international relations and South-South co-operation.

On the whole, the country had continued to progress and the people lived in peace and prosperity, Dr Mahathir said, adding that the emphasis given to nurturing unity and understanding among the communities would continue.

He said the people were also aware of the importance of nurturing racial harmony and national unity.

Dr Mahathir said the multi-racial and multi-religious population was not only tolerant but also mutually respectful of one another.

"We should indeed be proud of our success and achievements especially in living together in peace, unity and harmony despite being of different races, religions, cultures and having different traditions."

He said racial and religious conflicts in other countries had made Malaysians more aware of how imperative it was for them

PM: We'll strive to improve South-South ties

[1] FROM PAGE ONE

to continue to live in harmony.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on religious practices, saying that the Government would continue to uphold Islam as the official religion and allow non-Muslims to have religious freedom.

"In this respect, the Government will ensure that there will be no deviationist interpretation of Islam by any group.

"In carrying out these tasks, the Government will

always be guided by fairness and justice, as required by Islam, to ensure that our holy religion is not tarnished."

On trade activities, he said Malaysia would continue to foster relations with its traditional partners and seek new markets in Latin America, Africa and Central Asia.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was deeply committed to ensuring the success of the free trade system and would strive to improve its position as the world's 19th larg-

est trading nation.

On international relations, he said Malaysia would continue to play an active role, especially in strengthening bilateral ties and co-operation in various fields.

"We will strive to improve South-South relations," he said, adding that the country would step up co-operation with other developing nations through the Technical Co-operation Programme.

He noted that Malaysia's heartening economic

growth had brought about a good investment climate and abundant opportunities not only for local entrepreneurs but also foreign investors.

He said investment by the private sector had increased tremendously. This was further enhanced by the Government's efforts to improve the infrastructure facilities which would boost economic capacity and growth potentials, he added.

"This will help increase the income of those who work hard."