

24/01/1997

Batu Caves to be cultural centre

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Batu Caves will be turned into an Indian cultural centre in the near future, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said today.

He said the centre would cater for various cultural activities such as exhibitions, religious functions and cultural performances.

Speaking at a Press conference during the Thaipusam celebrations at the Sri Subramaniaswamy temple, he said Batu Caves, which hosts the largest gathering of Hindu devotees during the annual Thaipusam celebration, had the potential to enlighten the public on Indian values.

"There should be a ready centre to teach the people various values of Hinduism when they come here to pray.

"In a multi-racial society, the centre will eventually serve to enhance public understanding on Indian religious and cultural practices," he said.

Samy Vellu, who is also the MIC president, thanked devotees for donating more than RM100,000 to the temple's education fund during last year's Thaipusam celebration.

"Their contribution has enabled SRJK (Tamil) Batu Caves to have a new building. The construction which started last February is progressing as scheduled as I am personally supervising the work," he said.

The school will be equipped with a computer room, Internet facilities, resource centre and an audio-visual room to meet modern educational needs.

Commenting on the celebration, Samy Vellu expressed regret that certain quarters did not respect the auspicious day.

"There are too many distractions in the temple premises, namely loud modern music and songs.

"The people should only listen to religious songs when they enter the Batu Caves area," he said.

He said the consumption of non-vegetarian food within the temple compound would be prohibited from next year.

"Those who disobey this ruling should be sent out of the temple."

Samy Vellu also reiterated the call for Thaipusam to be declared a public holiday in the Federal capital.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had told us that he would only consider doing so if the auspicious day is declared a State holiday by all States.

"Thaipusam is the second biggest celebration for Indians after Deepavali and we hope 450,000 Hindus of the 1.7 million Indian population in the Federal Territory can gather here."

Until today, only five States - Penang, Negri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak and Johor - have declared the festival as a public holiday.

"We are now trying to get the Malacca, Kedah and Pahang State Governments to do the same," he said.

Samy Vellu added he had instructed the temple committee to close the man-made pond where a youth fell and drowned yesterday.

"We will instead build a smaller pond with a beautiful design which the people can use."

(END)