

10/02/1997

Festivals are important reminders

HARDLY had the scent and sound of Deepavali faded away, Christmas was upon us with its accompanying jingles familiar not just to the Christians but to most Malaysians as well. And now, slightly more than a month later, we are celebrating the joint Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Aidilfitri, each with its own colour, smell and sound. On each occasion we wish each other Happy Deepavali, Merry Christmas, Gongxi Fa-Cai and Selamat Hari Raya. Let us hope that we are honest and sincere in wanting our friends to enjoy good fortune, prosperity and long life. If our enthusiasm for this has become somewhat jaded, let us, on this auspicious Gongxi Raya, renew our resolve to honestly and sincerely strive so that a truly harmonious Malaysian nation would emerge. Thus, we must mean what we say every time we wish each other Happy Deepavali, Merry Christmas, Gongxi Fa-Cai and Selamat Hari Raya. We must say those things, not as the mouthing of some mindless mantras or out of a sense of duty, but more because we care for each other.

It would augur well for us to remember that these festivals, because of the way we celebrate them, are no longer exclusive but have become important parts of the national traditions and culture. The emotions they stir transcend the feelings and sentiments of their original cultural groups. At the very least, they are important reminders. As Aug 31, 1957 becomes more and more like some event from a distant past, these reminders have become more and more important. To the young, especially to those who were not there at the time of the nation's birth, their significance must constantly be stressed. Chinese New Year falling two days before the end of Ramadan was an important test. Muslims, led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, attended the Chinese open houses to be with their friends from the other religions even though they did not eat and drink with them. Such is the importance of these festivals and the attendant open houses - another Malaysian tradition that transcends race and religion.

Like the Prime Minister said in his Hari Raya message nothing comes easy. The harmony that we are enjoying is the result of hard work. To improve on it we have to work harder. He said: "The cordial relations between the various races of different religions in Malaysia is the result of the moderation of its people. Because of this moderation our nation is not only peaceful but also prosperous.

"Let no one think that this situation will be maintained without our having to work for it. Believe me, if we forget and follow our base instincts, our nation too will be hit by the kind of chaos that we see happening in other countries."

While on the Prime Minister's message, it was indeed courageous of him to raise the social problems afflicting the nation especially the Malays. He mentioned such ills as juvenile delinquency, loafing, bohsia, child abandonment and child abuse to the extent of causing death, prostitution, drug abuse, corruption, all kinds of fraud, divorce and single mothers, runaways from homes, school absenteeism and others. While Muslims talk of this and that being haram yet they are unable to prevent those among them especially their young from being drawn to the very activities that are haram. Surely there must be much that the Muslims can learn from the non-Muslims in this country. After all they are exposed to the same influences that are entering the country through our very porous borders.

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