

18/02/1997

PM: Preserve our special qualities of harmony

Syed Nadzri; Joniston Bangkuai

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysians to preserve the unique and special qualities of harmony that was so evident during the joint Chinese New Year and Hari Raya celebrations.

He said such qualities were so valuable considering the many difficulties faced by other countries over race and religious relations.

And this harmony, he said, was no doubt one of the by-products of the Malaysian Government philosophy based on the power-sharing concept.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a joint Chinese New year and Hari Raya gathering organised by the Sabah Government at the Sabah Trade Centre which he had earlier opened.

Despite the rain and the fact that it was already 10 days into the Chinese New Year and eight days into Hari Raya, the gathering attracted more than 5,000 people.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia was made up of people of various religions and races, they harboured little suspicion towards each other and this made such gatherings possible.

"It would be unthinkable for us to gather here like this if the country was anarchic and the people at war with each other.

"And the harmonious relationship has paved the way for the Government to be stable and the country to progress economically - hence we have a hall like this," he said, referring to the trade centre, a sprawling commercial and covention complex.

The Prime Minister also said Malaysians had no qualms about exchanging festive greetings like Selamat Hari Raya and Gong Xi Fa Chai "and now Selamat Kongsu Raya (greetings to commemorate a shared celebration).

"There is no harm in wishing Selamat Kongsu Raya because it has no religious significance. It is just a way of expressing our happiness that we are celebrating together.

"This is the uniqueness of Malaysia and let's preserve it," he added.

Speaking to reporters later, when asked to comment on the Court of Appeal decision on Bakun, Dr Mahathir said this meant that "we can continue with the project".

"I hope there will be no more hindrance," he said.

Asked on Umno going to Sarawak, he said the party would not spread its wing to the State.

Earlier, Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee said the spirit of togetherness fostered through the double celebration had given the people the confidence and courage to face the future.

He said when Malaysians in Sabah of all races come together, it gave the State leadership the determination to work hard to bring about progress and prosperity to the people.

Yong said Malaysia is blessed with national leaders who have the vision and the capability to bring the nation to a much higher level of progress and prosperity.

He cited Dr Mahathir's frequent visits to Sabah as a clear proof of the Federal leadership commitment towards overcoming the many complex problems faced by the State.

"He was here last month soon after tropical storm Greg and he is here again with us when we celebrate the Chinese New Year and Hari Raya," he said.

Yong said the Prime Minister's presence at the joint celebration showed that he is a leader who stands firmly with the people of the State, in good times and in bad times.

(END)