

31 MAY 1998

Mahathir-Race

ABSENCE OF RACIAL RIOTS MALAYSIA'S ADVANTAGE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 31 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the balanced development among all the races and their sensitivity and respect for each other had resulted in there being no racial riots in Malaysia.

Describing this as the country's advantage, the prime minister said although the people were from different races and religions they were sensitive to each other and this had prevented the occurrence of riots.

"We must value this because in our country, although there is severe economic pressure, there are no racial riots," he said at a "Semarakkan Semangat Cinta Malaysia" performance organised by the MCA at Merdeka Square, here, to promote love for Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said that in other countries with multiracial populations, riots occurred because the races blamed each other and in the process, many became victims and the economic situation deteriorated.

He cited as an example of Malaysians' sensitivity the gesture by the organisers to stop the performance for a while in respect for the time of the Isyak prayers at about 8.30pm.

"When we are sensitive to other people's problems, they are also sensitive to ours, hence they will not do anything that will anger us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said foreign journalists should view tonight's event but he believed that "they will not report because they always say that although Malaysia appears to be peaceful, below the surface there is a lot of tension among the races.

"If they report on Malaysia at all they never stop saying that the Malays and Chinese cannot not get along but when they see tonight's event, they close their eyes, ears and minds," he said to applause.

"If there are foreign television crews present, please take the pictures tonight. This is Malaysia, a peaceful country that should be prospering until they deliberately brought down our currency and share values, but we will fight back and defend our beloved nation," he said.

He also said that Malaysia had drawn up systematic measures to tackle the current economic problem and the most important one was to encourage the people to buy locally produced goods.

The prime minister said that buying local goods meant buying quality goods of world standard because Malaysia was now an exporter of high quality goods to all parts of the world.

"When we buy Malaysian goods, our money will not flow out of the country, our capital will accumulate, our business expand and our businessmen will profit.

"This will boost our ability to tackle the problems facing us now," he said.

Among the artistes taking part in the show was Malaysia's own James Bond girl Michele Yeoh.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the show was aimed at promoting unity through patriotic songs and spurring Malaysians to help rejuvenate the country's economy.

-- BERNAMA

AFY JK