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King and Dr Mahathir extend New Year greetings to Malaysian Chinese

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar and the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Ampuan Najihah today wished the Malaysian Chinese community a happy Chinese New Year.

The King said it was his hope that the celebration would further instil the spirit of unity among Malaysians who came from diverse cultures, especially when those of the Muslim faith would also be celebrating Hari Raya in a few days.

"The celebration of the two festivals is the best time to further unite the people.

"We have to be united as it was our main tool of defence particularly when the country was faced with economic problems," he said.

Tuanku Ja'afar and Tuanku Najihah also urged the people to support measures taken by the Government to overcome the country's economic problems.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his message, said despite the country's economic problems, the Chinese community would still be able to celebrate Chinese New Year in a joyful manner.

However, Dr Mahathir said he wished the people would be prudent in their spending during the festive season.

"We must spend wisely but not to the extent that could lead to traders facing problems due to lower sales or which could affect the celebration itself," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had introduced several measures to revitalise the country's economy but it would take some time and need the full co-operation of the people for its success.

He said the co-operation of the business community towards this end was of paramount importance.

"If we do not do something which can hurt the country's economy, such as wanting to make fast profits at its (the economy's) expense, we will recover in a short term.

"When the economy recovers, everyone will benefit," he said.

The Prime Minister said with the continued support from the people and their undivided loyalty to the country, he was confident Malaysia would be able to overcome its economic problems.

He said although the people would not celebrate this year's Chinese New Year as grandly as they did in previous years, the mood and spirit to usher in the auspicious festival was still prevalent.

He said Malaysians, who were known for their high degree of tolerance, should also continue with their tradition of visiting their fellow Malaysians who hold open house during the festival.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik in his joint Chinese New Year and Hari Raya message said he hoped Malaysians would make the wise-spending culture a way of life.

"I hope the people will continue to give their full support to the Government and play a role in helping the country overcome its economic problems.

"The steps initiated by the Barisan Nasional Government to overcome the economic problems are already showing positive results," he said adding that the people should work even harder to help strengthen the country's economy.

In this context, Dr Ling advised the people to buy Malaysian-made

products, study at local institutions, to holiday at home and to save their money in local banks.

Dr Ling said even foreigners acknowledged Malaysia's strong economic fundamentals despite the depreciation of the ringgit and the fall in the stock market.

"I am confident Malaysia will achieve an average growth rate this year despite its economic problems," he said.

Dr Ling said according to the Lunar calendar, this was the Year of the Tiger which reflected strength, bravery and dynamism. "I hope the people will adopt these elements so that we can join forces to help the Malaysian economy recover in a shorter period," he said.

He also reminded road users to be extra careful when driving during the festival.

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