

20/10/1998

Malaysians celebrate Deepavali in unity

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, was today celebrated by all Malaysians with unity as its resounding theme.

Many including diplomats who were met at the open house circuit were impressed by the multi-ethnic crowd at these places.

In this context, the experience of Indian High Commissioner Paramjit S. Sahai is worth recounting.

When Sahai arrived here three years ago, Deepavali was just around the corner.

"When I landed at the airport, I saw Deepavali signs which you don't see in many countries," he said at a Deepavali open house hosted by MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

In India, Deepavali is celebrated in the religious context.

Japan's Ambassador to Malaysia Issei Nomura and his Romanian counterpart Eugen Popa also had praises for the distinctive way which Malaysians celebrated religious festivities.

To Samy Vellu, Malaysian unity is the thrust of this year's celebrations. Others echoed his sentiment.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who led a big MCA entourage to Samy Vellu's residence, said the practice of having people of different races attending the open house should be further promoted.

"I am very pleased with this close bond and relationship," he said.

Also present were Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

Accompanying Dr Ling were his wife Datin Seri Ena Ling, Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh, Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Deputy Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Ong Ka Ting, Deputy Education Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs parliamentary secretary Datuk Tan Chai Ho and their wives.

Others present were Youth and Sports Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha, International Trade and Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Kerk Choo Ting and Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali.

Several DAP members took the opportunity to gather signatures for the "Pardon Lim Guan Eng" campaign.

However, the DAP members were politely asked to leave by Samy Vellu's aides when they saw the group moving around asking visitors to pen their signatures.

At the Gerakan open house, Dr Lim said the party decided to celebrate on a moderate scale due to the economic situation.

"In a multi-racial society like ours, the open house concept is one way to bring Malaysians together.

"We must remain united and support efforts initiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in reviving the economy."

Emphasising the adage "united we stand, divided we fall", Dr Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister, said unity would help the nation recover faster.

In Petaling Jaya, some 5,000 people attended the open house held by MIC deputy president Datuk S. Subramaniam at his residence.

Some of whom who arrived as early as 10am were treated to various local food such as thosai, roti canai, chicken curry and air batu campur.

In Ipoh, State Consumer Affairs and Unity committee chairman Datuk G. Rajoo held an open house.

Among his guests were Raja Puan Seri Noora Ashikin Raja Abdullah, the wife of Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, State Assemblyman for Batu Kurau Datuk Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar and State Assemblyman for Buntong Yik Phooi Hong.

In Johor Baru, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman and his wife Datin Prof Dr Jamilah Ariffin were among those who attended the open house of State MIC chief Datuk K.S. Balakrishnan at his residence in Bandar Baru Uda.

About 20 inmates from the Handicapped and Mentally Retarded Children Centre in Taman Melodies were among the guests.

In Kluang, scores of visitors turned up for the Deepavali reception held at the residence of Bandar Tenggara MIC division chairman P. Krishnan in Taman Perdana.

Among them were State Women Affairs and Social Welfare Committee chairman Halimah Sadique, Mengkibol State Assemblyman Ng Kim Lai and Paloh State Assemblyman Chong Ah Owon.

In Layang Layang, State Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Jimmy Low was among the guests at Sungai Benut MIC division chairman I. Krishnan's residence in Jalan Tebu.

Meanwhile, shopping complexes and hypermarkets in Johor Baru were packed with local and Singaporean shoppers.

In Alor Star, Malaysians of other races joined their Indian friends in celebrating Deepavali despite the uncompromising weather.

Indian traditional fares such as muruku, laddu and omapodi served with a choice of mutton and chicken curries, which have become Malaysian favourites, were eaten without any prompting from the hosts.

One such host, N. Naidu, who received an unending stream of friends from early morning, had to replenish the food very often as his guests really enjoyed the dishes.

The Hindu temples in Jalan Stadium and Jalan Putra were packed with worshippers who brought baskets of flowers and fruits as offerings.

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