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Unity and discipline key to overcoming economic problems (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the discipline and unity among the different races had helped Malaysia weather the problems caused by the ringgit's depreciation and drop in value of the stock market.

In his Deepavali message, he said Malaysians could now see some improvements in the country's economy due to efforts which had been taken such as the currency controls.

Malaysians were for the second time celebrating Deepavali amid the economic difficulties, but unlike last year, signs of recovery had now emerged, he added.

"We should be thankful because although the country faces economic difficulties, our lives have not been very severely affected," he said.

Compared to other countries, people in Malaysia could still buy sufficient food, clothing and medicine, he said.

In addition, the nation continued to enjoy peace, although there had been attempts by certain quarters to create chaos.

The Prime Minister said he believed this year's Deepavali would still be celebrated with much joy by Hindus as in previous occasions, and they would continue to serve food and drinks to visiting families, friends and relatives.

"This is a special feature of the Malaysian people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said on this joyous occasion, Malaysians should be grateful for all the good things they had enjoyed and continue the practice of visiting friends celebrating the festival.

He expressed hope that this would further strengthen ethnic relations and understanding which had for long steered the country towards the path of progress and prosperity.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali also wished all Malaysians who are Hindus a happy Deepavali.

In Penang, Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon reminded Malaysians to hold fast to the national spirit of mutual respect and understanding of one another's religious beliefs and cultural practices.

In his Deepavali message, Koh hoped and prayed that the Festival of Lights would bring light to all Malaysians for an economic recovery.

"This festive season is a time for all Malaysians to not only get together, but also reflect on, and reinforce unity and harmony."

In wishing Hindus a happy Deepavali, Koh said he would pray that the Festival of Lights would bring joy, harmony and unity to the people to help them pull through the current challenges.

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