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## Chinese praised for willingness to share bounty

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The basic economic strength of the Chinese community in Malaysia is among the factors that helped the country face the recent attacks by currency speculators, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"More importantly, the Chinese have clearly shown their willingness to share the bounty that Malaysia offers with the Malays and other races in the overall interest of the nation's stability.

"I hope this close co-operation and mutual understanding among the different races will continue," he said when opening the four-day World 15th Hakka Convention at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel near here.

Also present were Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia president Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik.

Dr Mahathir said the co-operation between the Malays and Chinese, or to be more exact - the Hakkas, began 150 years ago.

He said the Hakka presence in this part of the world dated back to the 17th century in Western Kalimantan.

By 1770, before the Dutch presence, their numbers had grown to 20,000 and by then the Hakkas had established what was known as "kongsis" (or fraternities) to protect their interests.

Towards the end of the 18th century, Hakkas, who had come from Kwangtung were so strong and powerful that they were able to establish a republic in Western Kalimantan. This republic lasted 107 years and had 10 Hakka presidents.

"History tells us that it was customary in those days for Hakka men travelling overseas not to take their wives with them.

"I believe that practice has since ceased and I am glad to see many ladies in the audience," said Dr Mahathir, who was greeted with loud cheers from the audience.

He said the history of Kuala Lumpur would be incomplete if "we do not take into consideration the contributions of the Hakka leaders who became "Kapitan China" or Chinese Captains of the tin industry."

"Even before the arrival of Yap Ah Loy in Kuala Lumpur from Sungai Ujong in Negri Sembilan in 1862, the village was already an active tin mining centre.

"At that time, Kuala Lumpur was governed by Yap Ah Loy's old friend, another Hakka, named Liu Ngim Kong from the Huichou Prefecture in China's Guangdong Province."

Yap Ah Loy's rise to wealth and fame was always assisted by his Hakka clansmen while his kinsman and business partner was Yap Ah Shak. While Yap Ah Shak was said to be an introvert, interested in business, Yap Ah Loy was an extrovert, having great charisma and enjoying public and political duties.

Dr Mahathir said the co-operation between the Malays and the Chinese began with the then leader of the Malay community, Mohamad Tahir, who laid the groundwork for the development of modern Kuala Lumpur with the two Yaps.

He said the community had grown in a cohesive force displaying not only vibrancy and entrepreneurship but had also within its ranks people who have distinguished themselves in the different professions - and in politics.

"Your convention in this capital city of ours is one more indicator that Malaysia has surely established itself as an international convention centre attracting leaders from a variety of fields," he said.

He commended Cheah for his contributions to society and in a lighter note associated Cheah with Yap Ah Loy who Dr Mahathir said has a strong tin mining background - truly a modern "Kapitan China".

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