

29/05/1999

Freedom of worship comes with responsibility (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Government is committed to guaranteeing freedom of worship for the people but this right should come with responsibility, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

"To enable everyone of us to enjoy a peaceful life, we should be prepared to sacrifice some of our rights. The Malaysian society was built on the philosophy of sharing and of compromise," he said in his Wesak Day message.

Wesak Day will be celebrated by Buddhists tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir said Buddhists in Malaysia had shown they were prepared to make this sacrifice so that everyone could enjoy as much freedom as possible in a multiracial society in the long run.

He said Buddhists had made great contributions to the country's development.

Besides carrying out social work such as running old folks homes, orphanages, medical centres, schools and rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, he said they have also played a major role in fostering religious and racial harmony in Malaysia's multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

As followers of a religion which chose the middle path, Dr Mahathir said the Buddhist community also rejected extremism in all forms and from whatever source.

"This principle is one of the factors that have enabled the country to be peaceful and prosperous."

Dr Mahathir hoped Buddhists would continue with their efforts to nurture a just society for all Malaysians in the new millennium.

The Prime Minister wished all Buddhists a "Happy Wesak Day."

Wesak marks the triple anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. The celebrations begin on the eve, today, with the lighting of lamps in the temples. At the Mahindarama temple in Penang, devotees started lighting 2,543 lotus candles to commemorate the birth of Buddha just as many years ago.

Tomorrow, devotees will make a beeline for temples for day-long celebrations starting with the morning prayers. Many temples will also feed the poor and people from old folks homes, and use the opportunity to hold blood donations and accept pledges for organs.

In Kuala Lumpur, among the highlights will be a candle light procession from the Buddhist Maha Vihara temple in Brickfields to the city centre and back, followed by an open-air special blessing service.

(END)