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Maintain peace and stability, leaders urge the people

KOTA KINABALU, Mon. - Muslims in the country should be thankful they are able to celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere, Sabah Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Sakaran Dandai said today.

Such a situation probably did not exist in some other countries that were still grappling with war and the economic downturn, he said in his Hari Raya message, here.

"The peace in this country would not have been possible without the diligence, care and commitment of the Government led by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," Bernama quoted him as saying.

Sakaran called on all Malaysians to appreciate the peace and stability in the country and to strive to curb all forms of negative activity that affected unity and harmony.

"All bitter experiences and enmity among themselves should be averted by the Muslims in Malaysia so as to further enhance unity among the multiracial population."

Sakaran also called on Muslims who are better off to share the Hari Raya joy with the poor and orphans by giving them aid.

Support should also be given to the Government, especially in dealing with the economic slowdown, he added.

In Kuching, Sarawak's Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Ahmad Zaidi Adruce Muhammed Noor said the people should appreciate the national leadership for its running of the country where all Malaysians live in peace and harmony.

"This is different from the situation in some other countries which are in upheaval," he said.

Ahmad Zaidi called on the people in the State to continue with the traditional practice of holding open house and to visit each other.

He said it was appropriate for Muslims and non-Muslims to continue maintaining sincere ties to further harmony and inter-racial understanding.

At a time when the country is facing an economic downturn, he advised the people to be prudent in their Hari Raya spending.

Zaidi also urged the people to exercise care when on the road during the festive period.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said the people should be thankful that the country was able to take effective measures to overcome the economic crisis.

"The number of people who lost their jobs was limited and not many businesses have gone bankrupt either," he said in his Hari Raya message read over radio tonight.

Taib said Sarawak's economy which recorded a four per cent growth last year, had escaped the recession which saw the national economy contract by almost seven per cent.

The State Government's decision not to cut expenditure on infrastructure for 1998 has paid rich dividends.

As such, it was not badly affected by the economic slowdown, he said.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin, in his Hari Raya address, said Muslims should always have a strong character to defend the sovereignty and stability of the country from foreign forces.

He said everyone should be united in facing the present challenges.

The strength of the Muslims lay with their unity, he said during his

address over Radio Tiga Melaka.

"This is an important and priceless weapon to the Muslims in dealing with negative propaganda, ideology and the narrow-mindedness of others towards the country."

Abu Zahar also called for continued harmony, adding that when harmony was present, the Government can fully focus its attention on the economic recovery.

In Kuala Lumpur, Works Minister and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu called on Malaysians to take the opportunity to preserve unity and political stability.

In his Hari Raya message, he urged the people to strengthen their determination and resolve to preserve multiracial harmony and national stability "so that no force can shake the strong foundation upon which the nation is built".

Samy Vellu said Malaysia would continue to be a shining example to the world as to what a country could achieve with racial harmony and political stability.

"Without doubt, these two important factors have contributed towards the country's capacity to overcome many challenges in the past.

The minister said it had again been proven that peace and harmony, coupled with political stability, were the factors which contributed largely to the country's return to the path of economic recovery.

"Let us lend our support and cooperation to the government in ensuring a speedy economic recovery," he said and called on non-Muslims to visit their Muslim friends during the celebration.

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang said Malaysians would be marking this year's Hari Raya in a very sombre atmosphere, as a result of the political and economic problems.

"In the final year to the new millennium, nothing is more important than for Malaysians to take sure and steady steps to overcome the triple political, economic and moral crisis, with all Malaysians making a common national resolve during Hari Raya that injustice shall not be the new national symbol of Malaysia," he said in a Press statement.

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