

31 JAN 1999

Thaipusam-Round-up

PENANG CHIEF MINISTER JOINS THAIPUSAM CELEBRATIONS

PULAU PINANG, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon was among thousands of Hindus who celebrated Thaipusam at the Bala Thandayuthabani Temple in Jalan Air Terjun here.

Speaking to reporters after attending the celebrations, the Chief Minister said Malaysians were fortunate that the country practised freedom of worship and this had enabled people of different religions to celebrate their big days in peace and harmony.

He said the spirit of tolerance practised in Malaysia was the main basis of the country's progress and development.

Dr Koh thanked Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Federal Cabinet for permitting the Thaipusam and Hindu religious activities to be held in Penang once more after the incident involving Muslims and Hindus in Kampung Rawa here last year.

He also visited the many food and drink stalls that had been erected along the route to the Temple.

Hundreds of foreign tourists also witnessed the celebrations.

At BATU CAVES near Kuala Lumpur several thousand Hindus, fewer than the anticipated two million, gathered at the hilltop temple to celebrate Thaipusam.

Among them were R.Ravichandren, 27, and his wife R.Selvi, 26, who had come to offer thanks at the temple for their first baby after several years of being married.

The couple paid its homage to the deity Murugan by bathing in the Sungai Tua, which is a tributary of the Sungai Gombak before making their way up the 272 steps to the hilltop temple.

The economic slowdown had failed to dampen the spirit of the devotees and the celebrations.

Locals and foreign tourists patronised the many stalls selling food, drinks and prayers items as well those set up by astrologers and fortune tellers.

However for fortune teller Raja Mariapan, 42, who uses a green parrot to tell one's fortune, business was not as brisk as in previous years.

"Few people came to seek my service this time," he said.

Raja who charges RM7 per session operates his permanent business at Lebu Ampang in KL's Central Business District. He will be at Batu Caves until tomorrow evening when the festival ends.

Beside those seeking good fortune, there were also people who came to collect donations.

S.Pathi, a lawyer, set up a stall at the foot of the hilltop temple to collect money for Sri Lanka's Tamils.

He said that he hoped to collect about RM50,000 during the three-day festival.

"The response from the Malaysian public has been good," he added.

In IPOH, more than 50,000 people converged at the Sri Subramaniam Temple grounds at Gunung Cheroh for Thaipusam.

At the Sri Subramaniam Temple in Simpang Pulai, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh was among the 20,000 people who attended the celebrations.

Speaking to reporters, he said the freedom of worship policy upheld by the Malaysian Government had enabled the people of different religions to celebrate their festivals.

-- BERNAMA
HJ AAM