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PM pays tribute to local Chinese community

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday paid tribute to the Chinese community in Malaysia whose basic economic strength has helped the country face the recent attacks by currency speculators.

"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," he said at the opening of the World 15th Hakka Convention in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

Addressing more than 1,000 delegates from Hakka associations around the world, he expressed hope that the close cooperation and mutual understanding among the different races in Malaysia will continue.

In praising the Hakka community, Dr Mahathir noted that "this community has grown into a cohesive force displaying not only vibrancy and entrepreneurship but also has within its ranks people who have distinguished themselves in the different professions and in politics." The presence of the Hakka community in Malaysia can be traced to the founding of Kuala Lumpur with the contributions by Hakka leaders such as Yap Ah Loy and Yap Ah Shak.

With the then leader of the Malay community Mohamad Tahir, the two Yaps laid the groundwork for the development of modern Kuala Lumpur, said Dr Mahathir, noting that this exemplified the cooperation between the Malays and Chinese which began 150 years ago.

In his speech earlier, President of the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah said the convention was the culmination of two years of work.

The theme of the convention is "Towards Greater Cultural and Economic Cooperation".

Among the issues to be discussed at the convention is the study of the traditions, cultures and origins of the Hakkas.

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