

01/01/1999

Resolve to make 1999 a better year

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Political and trade union leaders have resolved to make 1999 a better year and urged Malaysians to remain united and help the nation achieve a speedy economic recovery.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the party would strengthen its relationship with Chinese guilds and associations to develop its culture, economics and information technology skills in 1999.

"We will continue to take advantage of the large amount of energy, efforts and strengths of everyone to achieve our many objectives. That is our resolution for the New Year," he said.

Speaking after chairing the MCA presidential council meeting today, Dr Ling said all-round co-operation from relevant quarters was vital for the continued development of the community.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, in wishing Malaysians a happy New Year, urged them to work towards preserving unity which he described as a prerequisite for the speedy recovery of the country's economy.

He said that without unity and political stability, there would only be chaos and sufferings. He cautioned Malaysians against getting involved with undesirable elements out to split the nation by exploiting racial and religious sensitivities.

Samy Vellu paid tribute to Malaysians at large, especially the workers, for their sacrifices for the nation during difficult times.

DAP secretary-general and Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang said public confidence in the independence, impartiality and integrity of government institutions and democracy was shaken in the last 12 months.

Lim cited several events to back this contention.

These were the imprisonment of DAP deputy secretary-general and Kota Melaka MP Lim Guan Eng; the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Cabinet and Umno and the "black eye" incident; the disclosure about Special Branch's techniques of "turning over and neutralising" people.

And measures taken by the authorities against the "reformasi movement" which Lim described as "repressive".

Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon urged Malaysians, especially Penang residents, to maintain the Malaysia Boleh spirit and remain positive and proactive in facing the challenges of 1999.

He said they should also continue "our fine tradition of being productive, prudent and perseverant".

He said this had helped Malaysians withstand the onslaught of the economic turmoil and other events of 1998.

"In these two months, we are also in the midst of a major festive season for the various communities in Malaysia: Christmas, Ramadan and Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Thaipusam and Chinese New Year," he said.

"These festive occasions will reaffirm and reinforce our commitment to the great traditions and values which we have inherited."

Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok would spare no effort in ensuring that the State's economy recovers, saying that this was one of his resolutions for 1999.

"As we await to usher in the new year, the eve of the new millennium, let me assure that the recovery of the economy is foremost in my mind and of the State Barisan Nasional Government."

He said during the last four-and-a-half years, various long-term plans had been prepared by the State Government which included the Outline

Perspective Plan Sabah.

The OPPS serves to implement long-term measures to strengthen economic fundamentals of the State so that its competitiveness in the world market could grow.

He said there was also the Sabah Industrial Plan which was a comprehensive plan for the industrial development of the State.

MTUC president Senator Zainal Rampak said efforts to restructure the Employees' Provident Fund and to implement a minimum wage of RM1,200 rank high on the agenda of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress for 1999.

He said these two issues were among nine contained in the Langkawi Declaration of April 1997 which was adopted by the MTUC.

MTUC would also continue to champion the absolute rights and interests of workers, the freedom to have unions, freedom of expression, and adopt a more progressive attitude to improve the economic well-being of workers, he said.

He added that MTUC would continue to press the Finance Ministry to restructure the EPF so that it could give better dividends in line with its position as the country's biggest financial institution with assets exceeding RM140 billion.

On the minimum monthly salary of RM1,200, he said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad suggested that this could be implemented once the country's economy had recovered.

Cuepacs president N. Siva Subramaniam expressed confidence that the 800,000 members of the largest public sector employees union would continue to give solid support to nation-building efforts.

"The Government's decision to provide RM400 in assistance for parents to meet their children's schooling expenditure should make us feel proud," he said.

Malaysian civil servants had reasons to be thankful as they did not find themselves in the predicament of fellow government workers in other countries who had lost their jobs and had their pay cut, he said.

Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaakob said the State Government had been consistently trying to make Pahang a better place to stay.

"A prosperous State will definitely benefit its population," he said, adding that the effect was not only felt by a particular race, religious group, area or level of society but the entire population.

(END)