

07 NOV 1999

Mahathir-Deepavali

SCALE OF CELEBRATIONS YET ANOTHER SIGN OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the joyous scale of celebrations for Deepavali and other festivals this year is a sign of the country's economic recovery.

"I wish to say here that this year's Deepavali and other celebrations look merrier because things are looking up following the country's economy recovery," he told reporters at the Deepavali open house of Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu here today.

He said the economic recovery was evident from the people's ability to spend to celebrate the festivities.

"Looks like the people have more money to spend, shops are full, restaurants are full; so this is a good sign because for us to foster good ties and maintain peace, our economy must be good," Dr Mahathir said.

He said all the people should be thankful that there was no racial tension in the country.

Samy Vellu, who is MIC president, said the Deepavali celebrations showed that unity among the various races was getting stronger.

"I'm sure the integration from the festivities in this country has brought about a lot of good things for our country."

He said people of all races joined in the Deepavali celebrations as they did for other festivals, and this tradition should be preserved as it promoted unity.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the fact that people of other faiths joined their Hindu friends in celebrating the occasion was proof of the unity in the multi-racial society.

"This is Malaysia...whether we are Indian or not does not really matter," said Ling, who is Transport Minister.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said it has been the tradition in Malaysia for the people to share the joy of festivities irrespective of their racial and religious backgrounds.

"I am proud that many people are joining in the celebrations as this shows the goodwill among the people. This is something we should be proud of and strive to preserve because unity calls for cooperation from all quarters," he said.

Khalil, who is Information Minister, said the nurturing of ties among the people had created a strong sense of camaraderie.

Several foreign diplomats who were interviewed praised the open house concept, saying it clearly showed the strong unity among the various races.

British High Commissioner to Malaysia Graham Fry said the culture of celebrating festivities together in the spirit of Malaysians was something which should be emulated by the multi-racial societies of other countries.

"One of the great successes of Malaysia over the years is the way in which the races mix with each other in peace and harmony and without any kind of tension," he said.

His sentiment is shared by Finnish Ambassador Erkki Huittinen, who is impressed with the unity among the people.

"It's definitely proof of the existing harmony between the various ethnic groups", he said.

MIC deputy president Datuk S. Subramaniam, who is Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister, held open house at his residence in Petaling Jaya near here.

Some 1,000 people, including foreign diplomats, called on Subramaniam

and his wife Datin Tina Suganthi to wish them "Happy Deepavali".

Among those present were Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, ministers, former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam and corporate leaders.

Subramaniam said the practice of inviting people of other faiths and races to one's festival could help to promote unity.

All the people should remain united and support the government's economic recovery measures, he said.

-- BERNAMA

MHI RZS YBY