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King: Focus on national growth

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah today called on Malaysians to foster closer relationships with one another although they may have different political beliefs.

Stressing that the general election was over, he said it was now the time for the people to focus their utmost attention on national development, adding that the closer relationship should be reflected through good deeds and exemplary behaviour.

Speaking at the opening of the first meeting of the 10th Parliament's second session at the Dewan Rakyat, the King said the people should work together with the Government to strengthen the country's independence and sovereignty, and to continue its development.

"They should also counter all forms of narrow racial and religious thinking and uplift our dignity so that the country will always be respected and emulated by other nations ... and to ensure that Malaysia remains free, united and successful," he said in his 76-minute speech.

The King and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah were received upon arrival at Parliament Square by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail and Dewan Negara President Tan Sri Mohamed Ya'acob.

After the Negaraku was played followed by a 21-gun salute, the King proceeded to inspect a guard-of-honour mounted by 107 officers and men from the First Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment led by Mejar Abdul Basit Abd Rahman.

Also present at the ceremony were Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers, parliamentary secretaries, MPs and foreign diplomats.

Sultan Salahuddin said everyone must make a serious attempt to eliminate elements detrimental to harmonious living, be it to create disharmony among the various races or in relation to Islamic teachings and Muslim solidarity.

"Of late, it has come to our knowledge that there are activities contrary to the teachings of Islam being carried out by certain groups, causing deep rifts among the Muslims and threatening the harmonious living among the various communities in the country.

"The act of spreading false fatwa (religious rulings) that are not in tandem with Islamic teachings and the abuse of mosques and prayer houses are despicable and must cease immediately."

In order to achieve unity, he said it was hoped that none among the rakyat, especially Muslim intellectuals, would divide the ummah through the abuse of knowledge, deviation from true religious teachings, spreading hatred, instigating, slandering, lying and doing other contemptible acts prohibited in Islam simply for personal or group benefit.

On the economy, the King reminded the people of the danger of being complacent with the performance achieved so far although Malaysia had pulled herself out of the recession.

"This is because there still exist external risks that can cause adverse affects on the economy. Everyone should work harder to increase productivity, to make the country more resilient."

Touching on social development, the King felt the main challenge was to maintain unity because social stability was the cornerstone and a determining factor in ensuring economic success.

"The Government will ensure that the social agenda, especially measures to eradicate poverty and the restructuring of society will continue to be implemented ... "

Sultan Salahuddin said the country should also move towards making the service sector the main driving force of economic growth in the future, citing as examples sub-sectors like tourism, air and sea transportation, finance, commerce, education, health, professional and consultancy services.

On education, he said the Government would continue to improve the system.

He said changes in the education policy from the primary to tertiary levels were necessary to meet the country's human resource requirement and to accelerate the process of national development. The importance of information technology as an engine of economic growth did not escape the King's attention who said steps to make IT a culture would be implemented in schools.

On sports, the King said it was the Government's wish to make sporting activities a culture among the people, besides intensifying efforts to uplift the nation's achievements in high performance sports at the international level.

The King stressed Malaysia would continue to play an active role in promoting and protecting national interests at the international level through bilateral and multilateral relations, with special emphasis on efforts to safeguard the stability and prosperity of the Southeast Asian region through the framework of Asean.

Congratulating the MPs for their victory in the general election, the King urged them to carry out their duties and responsibilities with wisdom and honesty in the interest of the people and the country.

He advised them to maintain a high decorum while in the House to protect the nation's reputation.

He also expressed gratitude and appreciation to the Armed Forces, the police and the civil service.

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