

PM: Live as one big family

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on Malaysians to live as one big family with each member respecting the other's culture and religion.

He said that only by maintaining close relationships between people of different races and religions could the country continue to be peaceful and happy and subsequently become fully developed.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia was unique and had "something special" compared to other multi-racial and multi-

religious countries.

"Our uniqueness is the ability of each race to celebrate festivals with other races. During the fasting month, non-Muslims joined Muslims in breaking fast and today non-Chinese can join in this festival," he said at the *Dong Zhi* (Winter Solstice) festival held on a big scale for the first time at Putra Stadium in Bukit Jalil here last night.

He said this was one way Malaysians could understand and respect the other's religious practices and cultures.

"When we understand something, all feelings of fear and suspicion are gone because we know the practice

of another person's religion is not something strange," he said.

Dr Mahathir said, as a result, Malaysia was unlike other multi-racial countries that were not peaceful with people of diverse religions always fighting against each other.

He said that this year had seen a terrible event with resulted in a world economic downturn. Many countries, which before were successful, were now experiencing recession, he said.

"But in Malaysia, although our economic growth is not that good, it is not that bad either.

"We hear that in other countries people are rioting because prices of goods have increased drastically. They can't even afford basic necessities causing them to loot supermarkets," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in Malaysia, supermarkets and hypermarkets were filled with goods and crowded with people able to afford things, even spending extra for festive seasons.

More than 15,000 people including Cabinet ministers, Chinese community leaders, those from Chinese associations, educational institutions, religious groups and the public attended the *Dong Zhi* festi-

val.

Upon his arrival at the stadium, Dr Mahathir was greeted by organising chairman Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew. The stadium was a colourful sight as a 208-lion dance welcomed the Prime Minister.

To appreciate the meaning of the festival, the celebration began with an introduction to the culture and history of *Dong Zhi* which is the last festival in the Chinese calendar celebrated with the partaking of *tang yuan* or glutinous rice balls boiled in soup.

The *tang yuan* were served to VIP guests as they were entertained to joyful performances.