

Six national celebrations to cement unity

By *STAR* 5.2.2001
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PENANG: Malaysia is declaring six cultural and religious-based festivals as national celebrations in a move to inculcate the feeling of love for all races and eradicate ethnic-based suspicions.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government wanted the Chinese New Year, Hari Raya Puasa, Deepavali, Christmas, Hari Keamatan and Hari Gawai to be celebrated by all the 34 ethnic groups in the country.

"Then, we can get to know each other better, and eliminate the feeling of suspicion towards others.

"Like the Malay saying goes, *tak*

kenal maka tak cinta, meaning if you don't know the other person, you will not love the other person," he said at the opening the Third Millennium Chinese New Year open house here last night.

Dr Mahathir said it had always been the Malaysian tradition to "celebrate each other's festive celebration," and now the federal and state governments want to make those occasions as national celebrations.

"Everybody (foreigners) has been saying that Malaysia with its multi-racial population will never be at a state of peace to develop itself.

"But we have proven to the world that the people of Malaysia love peace, tolerate each other, and can live together. And now we can celebrate each other's festivals togeth-

er," he said, adding that Malaysians should continue to uphold the spirit of unity.

Dr Mahathir said the over 20,000 people of various races and religions who attended the "national level" Chinese New Year open house in Penang last night showed that "we all agree on this (to celebrate each other's festivals together), that is why we have such a strong turnout."

Later, thousands of locals and tourists managed to catch a glimpse of Dr Mahathir when he went on a kilometre-long heritage trail covering Penang's most prominent historical sites.

The sites included the Khoo Kongsi, Cheah Kongsi, Yap Kongsi, Poh Hock Seah (a heritage house) and Dr Sun Yat Sen's Penang Base.