

24/01/2001

Dr Mahathir: Renew commitment to peace and stability

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged all Malaysians to renew their pledge of support for unity and racial harmony.

In his Chinese New Year message, he reminded all races to realise that since Malaysia was heterogenous, no one race would be fully satisfied with its lot, nor would it receive all that it demanded.

"This truth must be accepted by all races so that ... race relations in Malaysia will remain peaceful and stable," Dr Mahathir said.

Citing an example, he said that although Bumiputeras were given slightly preferential treatment, it did not affect the rights and opportunities of others.

Dr Mahathir added that efforts to forge a balanced society have ensured that racial riots did not occur during the economic downturn.

He said that although the country made the transition into the new millennium at a time of difficulty, Malaysians are lucky to celebrate each other's festival in peace and harmony.

Dr Mahathir urged Malaysians to play an active role in preserving unity and harmony during the Chinese New Year celebrations by visiting open houses to maintain close ties.

He said more benefits would be derived from national stability than from a nation threatened by riots.

The Prime Minister added that, unlike some other countries, the people of multi-racial, multi-religious Malaysia could live in peace.

"Some of us may be from minority groups, but our rights and freedom ... to preserve our identity are guaranteed.

"We are free to observe our practices, culture, language and religion without obstacles."

Dr Mahathir said the Chinese New Year celebrations this year were special because it is the first festival to be celebrated by the people in the new century at the beginning of the third millennium.

"My wife (Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali) and I would like to wish a happy Chinese New Year to all Malaysians, especially to Malaysia's Chinese community, who celebrate this auspicious day."

Meanwhile, leaders of Malaysian political parties, in their messages, expressed a common hope that racial harmony would continue to ensure political stability and peace in the community and the country.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik called on Malaysians to refrain from raising sensitive issues which could spark off communal tension.

Dr Ling, who is Transport Minister, in his statement to Bernama, expressed the hope that the Malaysian festive tradition of visiting one another's homes would continue for friendship and goodwill.

"According to Chinese tradition, this is the year of the golden snake. Hopefully, it will improve the lot of the people and brings progress to the country in all fields," he said.

Dr Ling also urged Malaysians to strive hard to strengthen the country's economic position.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, in his message, said all Malaysians, especially the Chinese community, should focus on values that ensured their continued prosperity and development as loyal citizens.

"The values inherited from past generations that are followed as a way

of life - hard work, thrift and initiative - have created prosperity and stability that is a matter of pride enjoyed by Chinese Malaysians of the present generation," he said.

Dr Lim, who is Primary Industries Minister, said the people must continue to nurture the give-and-take spirit that embodied the unique society of Malaysia.

Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister and Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) president, Tan Sri Dr George Chan Hong Nam, expressed a wish to see the Chinese continue to integrate well and live in harmony with other races while maintaining their identity in Sarawak.

Dr Chan, who is also State Finance and Utilities Minister and State Industrial Development Minister, said: "I would like the Chinese community in Sarawak to pass on this good trait of theirs to their future generations so that Sarawak will become a model State in Malaysia for peace, unity and racial harmony where extremism in all forms is non-existent.

He said tolerance and respect for others' customs and beliefs had been a hallmark of the people of Sarawak.

People's Progressive Party president and Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk M. Kayveas expressed hope that the festivity would foster closer rapport among people of all races.

"The celebration should be taken as an avenue to put aside all racial differences and for people to come together as one and inculcate tolerance," he added.

National Unity Advisory Panel member Datuk Lee Lam Thye said as they celebrated the Year of the Golden Snake it was appropriate for them to reflect on past achievements in nation-building to prepare themselves for the challenges that lay ahead.

Lee said as part of the Malaysian community, the Chinese should take pride in the fact that since independence they have made many contributions to help the country develop.

"I wish to remind all my Malaysian friends that racial harmony and unity must never be taken for granted. ... The country's unity remains one of our greatest achievements."

Malaysian Youth Council president Saifuddin Abdullah said the council, which represented 37 youth organisations, gave importance to racial unity among people of all races and religion.

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