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Mahathir-Unity

M'SIANS SHOULD CHERISH THE INVALUABLE GIFT OF RACIAL HARMONY, SAYS PM

TANGKAK, May 18 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded Malaysians to always cherish and treasure national unity which he described as an invaluable gift to the country.

Although its immense value could not be measured in material terms, it was this gift of unity that contributed to Malaysia being the most advanced among developing nations, he said.

"Therefore let us not commit anything that can upset the racial co-existence and tolerance in place," he said when addressing a get-together with the masses at Dataran Ledang here today.

The prime minister is on a two-day visit to Johor.

At a time when people in other multi-racial countries were still clawing at each other, Malaysians have already reached a level of advancement that they were at today, he said.

This gave Malaysians -- be they Malays, Chinese, Indians and the Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak -- all the more reason to strengthen the bond of understanding and tolerance among them, he said.

He said that strictly speaking given the multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual characteristics of Malaysians, it would be unimagineable for them to share a table.

"This is because the Malays will find it offensive if a certain meat dish is served and leave the table and likewise if a beef dish is served, the Indians will feel uneasy," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir, citing today's reception, said he was thankful that Malaysians of various communities could still share a table and enjoy the food served because the menu took into account the sensitivities of the various races.

Malaysians too have no apprehension about attending mass multi-ethnic functions as the communities have no reason to fear each other, he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was touched by today's large turnout and the reception accorded him and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed.

He and Dr Siti Hasmah were mobbed by autograph-hunters and ordinary folk seeking to shake their hands and be photographed with them.

Also present were Johor Menteri Besar and Ledang assemblyman Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Information Minister and Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, who is also the MP for Pagoh.

Dr Mahathir earlier held a closed-door meeting with members of the Segamat and Bakri Umno divisions.

Dr Mahathir later held a two-hour meeting behind closed doors with about 800 leaders and members of the Gelang Patah and Pontian Umno divisions in the Gelang Patah community hall near Johor Baharu.

The prime minister and Dr Siti Hasmah later left in a motorcade for Johor Baharu where Dr Mahathir is scheduled to open a seminar on the development of the Ummah tonight.

-- BERNAMA

RAM RYN