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Leaders call for tolerance, unity

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - National leaders and organisations today urged all Malaysians to reaffirm their commitment to the country in conjunction with National Day.

They called for the culture of mutual hatred to be discarded in favour of tolerance and understanding.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu urged Malaysian Indians to imbibe the spirit of Merdeka and value the progress made in the 44 years of independence.

Malaysia, a small nation of 23 million, had been transformed since independence in 1957 through vast development projects and political stability which had ensured peace in this multi-racial society.

"Malaysia is a small nation on the world map, but we are known because of our progress and achievement," he said in his Merdeka Day message.

Samy Vellu, who is the Works Minister, said the country practised democracy which was accepted by all the races and there were opportunities for all.

He also called on the Indian community to work harder and preserve unity.

Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat said the culture of mutual hatred should be discarded.

If they were not checked at the outset, extremist groups and militants would continue to increase.

"This will harm the country and eventually destroy the nation."

National Unity Advisory Panel member Datuk Lee Lam Thye said Malaysians of all races should strive to remain united.

Economics and information and communications technology might be the driving force for development in this millennium, but they could not solve the ever-increasing problems of Malaysia's multi-racial society.

"Unity is the bond that seals our nationhood. It is the foundation upon which we build relationships, families, communities and a nation."

Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk M. Kayveas said it was important for Malaysians to be tolerant.

"We achieved Independence 44 years ago and since then many have forgotten how hard our forefathers fought for it. Independence was gained through the co-operation of the various races.

"As the new generation, we should work towards retaining the harmonious environment. Don't be influenced by extreme political ideologies."

He said Malaysians should also be aware of their roles in helping the nation develop its economy.

Malaysian Youth Council president Saifuddin Abdullah said youths should realise that the National Day was not just any other date on the calendar but had significant meaning.

"Independence is an ongoing struggle. It does not only mean independence from political colonisation, but it also means independence of the mind, thoughts, culture, and economy.

"As such, the council will continue with its Patriotisme Alaf Baru programme launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Feb 18."

Christian Federation of Malaysia executive secretary Dr Hermen Shastri said there were many challenges for the nation and it would require commitment, goodwill and co-operation on the part of all Malaysians.

"We call upon those responsible for law, order and public security to defend religious minorities and to bring to court those who commit crimes against religious freedom and the sanctity of holy places."

Malaysia Hindu Sangam president A. Vaithilingam said parents must be good role models to their children.

"The fast pace of our lives should not disrupt family life," he added.

Meanwhile, Nando's director Chung Lynn Mac Carpenter said paper flags would be available for free at all 10 Nando's restaurants in the country.

"As a reward for being a patriotic Malaysian, bring in our flag and redeem a free gift at any of our restaurants. The public can also get free flags on National Day by going up to a Nando's staff carrying an A-Board in the vicinity of Nando's restaurants and Dataran Merdeka."

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