

22 DEC 2001

Mahathir-Ties

MAINTAIN RACIAL HARMONY, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reminded the various races to preserve their friendship to ensure continued peace and harmony in the country.

The prime minister said the fostering of ties would bring a lot of benefits to the people.

"All the people of Malaysia from all races are one family, and we should enhance our ties as a Malaysian family.

"If we can forge closer ties, the country will definitely be more peaceful and prosperous," he said at the Dong Zhi (Winter Solstice) festival observed by the Chinese community at Stadium Putra in Bukit Jalil here tonight.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should be grateful for the good life they are enjoying.

Malaysia is a unique country where people of different races and religions could live in peace and harmony, and with mutual respect, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people in Malaysia displayed something special because they celebrated various festivals according to their own religious beliefs and practices.

Muslims had just finished observing the fasting month and were now celebrating the Aidilfitri which was joined in by non-Muslims, he said.

"I am very happy because at one breaking-of-fast function at my house several leaders of other religions...Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity were also present to break the fast together," he said.

This way people of other religions could observe how Muslims practised Islamic teachings while today Muslims have a chance to see how the Chinese celebrate Dong Zhi.

Dong Zhi, which is celebrated on Dec 22, is a time for thanksgiving as families reflect on the blessings of the past year and pray for prosperity in the next.

Families celebrate the occasion by making "tang yuen" or glutinous rice flour balls, which symbolise wholeness, unity and harmony, and offering them to deities and ancestors during prayers.

The prime minister said that joining in the festivals of people of other religions could help Malaysians to understand each other better.

"When we understand something, any feeling of suspicion and fear will disappear because we know what is practised by people of other faiths as their religious observances is not something strange.

"We learn how to understand each other by understanding others' festivals. This is Malaysia," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the coming Christmas and Chinese New Year celebrations would also be occasions for the people to promote racial understanding and unity.

He said this year was marked by various events with serious implications, including the global recession which had hit even developed countries.

Although Malaysia also suffered economic slowdown, the situation was not as bad as in other countries where there were riots, he said.

"This is Malaysia, this is our country. Together we will build this country until we become fully developed by the year 2020. Let us be together...you, I and every one of us must work hard to lead Malaysia to

become a developed country on time and also develop ourselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir was glad that he could join the Chinese community in celebrating the Dong Zhi festival which was held on a big scale for the first time.

He hoped that the festival could be celebrated every year although there is no winter in Malaysia.

Some 20,000 people attended the function which was filled with various events, including performances on the origins of Dong Zhi, a lion dance and the Wai Tang Kung martial art.

-- BERNAMA

HS FA YBY