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Malaysians come together as one

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Malaysians of all faiths across the nation today participated joyfully in the Festival of Lights, which celebrates the triumph of good over evil.

Thousands thronged the traditional open house of community leaders of the Hindu faith to wish them a Happy Deepavali.

The Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry also held a Deepavali celebration for the first time, at Istana Budaya.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, visited MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu at his open house at the Chung Hwa Independent Secondary School here.

Dr Mahathir said he thought the crowd was much bigger than in previous years, with all races - Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans - joining in to celebrate the festival. "This is something that we should learn to value. In other countries, this is not possible," he said.

Samy Vellu, who is also Works Minister, said it was a "very good open house" and he was very happy that friends of all races were present. This is the type of unity, he said, which should prevail in Malaysia.

MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, who also visited Samy Vellu, said the celebration by all races was a unique trait of Malaysians.

"This is what has held us together for so long and what will continue to hold us together," he said.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah later visited Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Datuk S. Subramaniam at his open house at the Civic Centre in Petaling Jaya.

In the afternoon, they joined the celebration at Istana Budaya.

Many non-Indians wore Indian dress, like Dr Siti Hasmah who was in an apple green salwar kameez and MCA Wanita chief Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen who was in a pale blue beaded salwar kameez.

More than 1,000 people attended the Gerakan Deepavali open house held at Menara PGRM. President Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the party had always celebrated the festival with its Indian members.

"We must remain united and support efforts initiated by the Government in reviving the economy," said Dr Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister.

In Seremban, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad joined hundreds in visiting former MIC vice-president Datuk M Muthupalaniappan. Present were Mohd Isa's wife Datin Seri Azizah Tumin and State executive councillors.

In Port Dickson, Health Ministry parliamentary-secretary S. Sothinathan entertained hundreds of people who came to his house in Jalan Tanjung Kemuning.

In Ipoh, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali visited the homes of State Executive Councillor Datuk G. Rajoo and State Public Works Department director Datuk I. Dorairajoo.

"This is indeed a symbolic reflection of the country's diverse cultural background," Tajol Rosli said of the mixed crowd.

He said the biggest oil lamp, to mark the celebrations, would be lit at Dataran Ipoh in Greentown tomorrow evening.

In Shah Alam, thousands attended the open house of the State Plantation and Mining Housing and Unity chairman Datuk K. Sivalingam, including

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo and wife Datin Seri Zahrah Kechik.

In Penang, more than 1,000 well-wishers thronged the open house of State People's Progressive Party chief Datuk J. Logabala Mohan. Among the dignitaries were Chief Minister Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon and his deputy Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya.

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