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PRESERVE RACIAL CO-EXISTENCE FOR STABILITY'S SAKE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that by preserving inter-racial co-existence Malaysians stand to benefit much from a peaceful and stable nation than by having extra rights but living in a strife-torn country.

"In multi-racial Malaysia, no one community can be satisfied with whatever that it gets and no one community will ever get all what it wanted," Dr Mahathir said.

This was the reality all communities in the country must accept, he said in a Chinese New Year message issued by the Office of the Prime Minister today.

He expressed hope that Malaysians would take opportunity of the Chinese New Year to renew their pledge to uphold racial harmony and unity.

"Do visit friends holding open house to reinforce the bond of amicability for us to continue enjoying the peaceful life," he said.

Dr Mahathir said unlike people in some other countries, Malaysians were a fortunate lot as each year they could celebrate festivals of the various communities in peace and harmony and were free to practise their cultures, customs, religious obligations and speak their mother tongue.

"Some of us may be from the minority group but our freedom and rights as Malaysians to retain our own identity are guaranteed," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although the Bumiputera enjoyed a little bit more privileges, the other communities were not denied of their rights and opportunities.

In fact, efforts promoting equal racial standing were instrumental in ensuring Malaysia was free of communal riots even at times of economic slowdown.

Dr Mahathir and wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali wished all Malaysian Chinese Gong Xi Fa Chai.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, in his message, emphasised the importance of racial harmony in guaranteeing perennial political stability and peace in the community.

"Let us all refrain from raising sensitive issues which can spark off communal tension that brings no benefit at all to the people and country," said Ling.

He expressed hope that the Malaysian festive tradition of visiting one another would continue to prevail and bolster friendship and goodwill.

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

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

In his Chinese New Year message, People's Progressive Party president Senator Datuk M. Kayveas urged Malaysians to continue striving towards a united and tolerant society.

"By being united and tolerant, I am convinced we can overcome all trials and tribulations," he said in a statement.

A member of the National Unity Advisory Panel Datuk Lee Lam Thye, in his message, reminded Malaysians not to take racial harmony and unity for granted.

"We have to ensure that the country's unity, painstakingly built and carefully nurtured over the years is not threatened by any other quarters,"

he said.

"The intermingling of the various races during festivities helps to reinforce goodwill, unity and racial harmony and it is this context that holds this nation together and this is where the strength of our nation lies," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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