

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

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Many reasons to greet New Year with optimism, says PM

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

PETALING JAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysians should count their blessings for the peace and stability in the country and its relatively strong economy this year despite enormous pressure resulting from the economic slowdown in the United States and Japan.

The Prime Minister said Malaysians were able to greet the New Year with greater optimism, thanks to the majority of the people who were rational and believed in moderation.

"Their help and support have enabled Malaysia to withstand various challenges arising from the worsening world economy. We should be thankful for this because compared to other countries, we are much more luckier," he said in his New Year message.

He said although foreign investments and the country's exports declined drastically throughout the year, the Government had introduced various measures to encourage growth of domestic businesses to insulate the economy from external pressures.

The country's sound financial management, he said, had also enabled the Government to introduce fiscal stimulus packages worth billions of ringgit besides paying bonus to its civil servants.

Dr Mahathir said due to the uncertain world economic outlook, the Government would **continue** to exer-

cise great caution in its spending as "we don't know what other disaster will happen in the future."

All these, he said, proved that the people and the Government could work together to protect the country's economy without having to depend too much on external factors.

"We have everything to make our lives complete here in Malaysia, including places of interest for family holidays that cater to everyone's need. Our country does not lack for anything as we produce our own food and other needs.

"In truth, our economic growth and prosperity depend a lot on our own agility," he added.

The year 2001, he said, was also a lucky year for Malaysia because the country had not only succeeded in hosting the SEA Games, but also topped the medals standing with full support from the people who came in droves to the stadiums to lend moral support to the national athletes.

On the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Dr Mahathir said the only good thing that came out of the sad incident was that Malaysia, through its strong stand against terrorism, was accepted by the world as a country that practised moderate and true Islamic teachings.

He said Malaysia had proved to the world that an Islamic country could be stable, administered well and develop well even if it practised democracy.