

Celebrate, not quarrel, over festivals

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I ALWAYS look forward to the Hari Raya celebrations. It's not just an occasion to share the joy of celebrating this Muslim festival but an occasion to renew friendships.

While many Malaysians and tourists take the opportunity to visit the open houses of VIPs, I have always made it a point to call on Roslan Othman, the security officer of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Although he has to work during the festive season, the Kedah-born policeman tries to hold his *makan* session at his Putrajaya home, located within the Sri Perdana complex, a week after Hari Raya.

Roslan and his wife simply serve the best *laksa* and beef *rendang* I have ever tasted. This could probably be vouched for by the staff of the Prime Minister and Dr Mahathir himself.

As a northerner myself, we like our *laksa* hot and spicy with a generous dose of *otak udang*, the thick black prawn paste that can be found only in Kedah, Perlis and Penang.

As a Malaysian, I count myself very lucky to be born in this country as Malaysia's multi-racial setting has blessed us with so many traditions and festivals.

In fact, Malaysia must have the largest number of public holidays, reflecting the government's recognition of these ethnic holidays. In most Western countries, despite professing multi-culturalism, these important celebrations are ignored.

Regardless of our religion, these festivals have become a truly Malaysian affair. We open the doors of our homes, not just to friends but total strangers, without any fear.

The festivity becomes even more unique and meaningful when Hari Raya and Chinese New Year coincide, giving birth to the new term "Kongsi Raya" which means the sharing of celebrations.

This year, Hari Raya and Christmas will be celebrated in December, which is certainly wonderful and should be emphasised by Malaysians who truly believe in racial tolerance.

Malaysian newspapers have correctly pointed out that in some shopping complexes, the owners appeared to have put up Christmas decorations ahead of the Hari Raya festival.

It is certainly an insensitive act as the managements of these errant shopping malls - although the number is admittedly small - should instead have promoted and emphasised the double celebrations.

The managements of these shopping malls may not have realised their actions have hurt the feelings of Muslims as Hari Raya is celebrated on a large scale. The media is right to point out this is not the first time.



On The Beat

By WONG CHUN WAI

Crass commercialism by our businessmen is to be blamed for this. Within the Chinese community, many of us have long complained about how the traditional mooncakes have been on sale in the midst of the Hungry Ghosts Festival. For the traditional minded, it is a *pantang* because the Mooncake Festival, which comes a month later, is regarded as a more divine occasion.

But some politicians have attempted to create a racial dimension to this slip-up, which I think is unnecessary. The use of harsh words, in this season of forgiving, is hardly appropriate.

The country needs more Malaysian heroes like Dr Mahathir and his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who understand what compromise and tolerance means.

Malaysians don't want self-seeking political wannabes, who want to appear like heroes of their communities. For budding politicians from political youth wings, they certainly need to learn a thing or two from our true national leaders, if they aspire to bigger roles in national politics.

Over the past one week, there have been statements made by some politicians and non-governmental organisation leaders without regard for the feelings of Malaysians.

Statements have been distorted to suit the political agenda of these personalities without

considering the larger interests of this country.

In the past, such actions may help win votes but Malaysian politicians have realised that they cannot hope to win elections by depending on one community as electoral constituencies become more racially balanced.

It is best that our media, especially the Bahasa Malaysia and Chinese newspapers, ignore these exchanges which lead to nowhere, except to raise political temperatures.

Many of these statements certainly do not help to integrate and unite Malaysians but only divide the country. After celebrating Deepavali last month, it should be a joy to usher in Hari Raya, Christmas, the New Year and the Chinese New Year.

If we want to prove a point to the world that we are "truly Asia" and a showcase of multi-ethnicity, then we should emphasise on how we have been able to live together for years in the spirit of unity and tolerance.

There is a need for our budding politicians, who claim to be role models, to exercise more self-restraint and caution in their choice of words when making press statements.

It is more important for Malaysians to be able to celebrate our festivals together, not quarrel over who should celebrate which festival first in Malaysia.

Roslan's Hari Raya open house, to most officials and journalists, is simply enjoyable because there is genuine warmth and friendship among the visitors. The best part is, there are no politicians.

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