

31 MAY 2003

Mahathir-Gawai

DR M AND WIFE EXTEND GAWAI GREETINGS TO S'WAK PEOPLE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 31 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, have wished the Dayak community in particular and Sarawakians in general a "Happy Gawai Dayak".

The prime minister hoped that the two-day festival beginning tomorrow would be celebrated in a festive atmosphere now that the SARS outbreak had been brought under control in the country.

He was confident that this would encourage Dayaks working outside the state to return home for the festival marking the end of the harvest season.

"I hope it would not foil the plans of those wishing to return to their hometowns to celebrate the festival with their families or relatives and close friends who want to visit them," he said in his Gawai message.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the other races in Sarawak would join in the Gawai festival as it was also an official celebration of the state.

He said the government had been promoting the festivals of the various races in the country, including the Gawai.

"It is clear that our country, comprising people of various races who are tolerant, practises freedom of religion, culture and language. We should preserve this uniqueness for the sake of our prosperous co-existence as a race of Malaysia," he said.

He said it was obvious that the government's efforts to inculcate mutual respect and cooperation and foster unity among the various races had been very successful.

This was evident as the people were not easily influenced by certain elements trying to create chaos in the country by splitting the various races, he said.

Instead, the people had handled racial issues well, he said.

Dr Mahathir reminded the people to preserve the peace and stability in the country as this would enable it to develop more rapidly.

Therefore, all races should take the opportunity to celebrate Gawai Dayak to further strengthen racial ties and understanding, he said.

-- BERNAMA

HM KHY YBY