

16/08/2003

Dialogue participants learn of open house, Malaysian style

THE African community should know by now how effective Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Chinese New Year "open houses" are in uniting Malaysians.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Thursday enlightened leaders of Africa and dialogue participants on the concept of the Malaysian open house in a session known as the "Ezulwini Open House session", introduced for the first time in a Smart Partnership dialogue.

Invited at the session to explain the Malaysia concept of open house, the Prime Minister said it was a Muslim custom of inviting each other to visit their houses at festival time such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri.

"We hold an open house where we welcome everybody to our house to partake of the spread that's put on the table.

"They come to greet the host. I also hold open house. About 70,000 people visited my open house but I managed to shake hands with only 30,000. I stood from 9am until 8pm to greet them, wishing them the best.

"At the same time, I make friends with many of them. Even political foes attend open house," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the open house concept in dialogue was useful to enable people of various backgrounds to express their views openly.

"We don't believe in being exclusive. This is what open house is all about. If the dialogue has this kind of spirit, then we will get to listen to many views and to get to know many people," he added.

Later, the leaders had a dialogue with the media.

This time, it was the leaders posing questions to journalists instead of them fielding questions.

The dialogue between the leaders and journalists focused mainly on the role of media and the media's perception of the dialogue.