

26/11/2003

Huge turnout at Pak Lah's open house

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The first Hari Raya open house hosted by Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Prime Minister saw a huge public turnout.

The event, held at the Putra World Trade Centre, had different races enjoying a good spread of food amid gaily decorated surroundings.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said the turnout of about 70,000 people was an indication of Abdullah's popularity and the public's eagerness to know him better.

"I'm glad there are so many people here, from all races and walks of life. It shows that the Prime Minister is also a people-friendly leader," said Ong when met at the open house.

Ong, who is also MCA president, extended Hari Raya greetings to all Muslims and said he was happy that Malaysians of other races could join in the celebrations.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he was pleased to see the huge turnout.

"It's times like these when all the races are celebrating together, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

"This is proof that we live in harmony in a peaceful country," Najib said.

Works Minister and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said he was glad Abdullah was carrying on the tradition of holding open house as a way to unite all Malaysians.

Samy Vellu said Malaysians should also thank former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for creating the open house culture which helped foster the Bangsa Malaysia identity.

"Having open house unites the races. We are able to celebrate all religious festivals regardless of race," Samy Vellu said.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said Malaysians should use Hari Raya as an occasion to appreciate the peace and harmony Malaysians enjoyed.

"We've many things to be thankful for, that we can keep terrorism at bay, that we have unity and tolerance in this country," he said.

Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin extended Hari Raya greetings to all suppliers and business people in the country who had helped the rakyat (people) get their provisions at reasonable prices under the controlled price list.

He said the ministry would continue to monitor the situation, adding that the percentage of those who flouted the controlled items price list was very small.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said he hoped all Muslims were holding their own open house and invited their non-Muslim friends.

"It doesn't have to be a big open house, what's important is that they invite people of all races. While we enjoy and celebrate, we can also strengthen unity," he said.

Abdullah had used PWTC in previous years as the venue for his Hari Raya open house, while he was Deputy Prime Minister.

In keeping with the spirit of Hari Raya, some non-Muslim Cabinet ministers, deputies and members of Parliament chose to go ethnic and donned traditional Malay clothes.

Others at the open house were Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Law Hieng

Ding, Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid and Merbok MP Tun Daim Zainuddin.