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PM: Preserve unique multi-cultural identity, tolerant culture

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysians should protect and preserve their country's unique multi-cultural identity and tolerant culture, which has brought them peace and prosperity, Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said that tolerance had made multi-racial Malaysia a more interesting and culturally dynamic country.

In his Chinese New Year message, he urged Malaysians to compare Malaysia with ethnically homogeneous nations. "We are truly lucky and blessed," he said. "That is why we have to work hard to preserve this racial tolerance that exists, as we have benefited from it."

He urged Malaysians to take the festive opportunity to strengthen ties of friendship by having open house gatherings as is the practice during other festivals.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians of Chinese origin celebrating together with their brothers of other races proved that the Government's policies had been successful.

He said in certain other Asian countries, Chinese culture had been curbed and not allowed to flourish.

"Here in Malaysia the Lunar New Year is celebrated as a national holiday," he noted. "It is a public holiday and celebrated on a grand scale by government bodies."

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysians should be proud of their country for being recognised for its multi-racial and multi-religious diversity, especially at a time when racial and religious tensions were evident in other parts of the world.

Wishing all Chinese Malaysian Chinese a Happy New Year 2003, the Prime Minister said the Chinese New Year would be celebrated as in previous years, without any disturbances or obstructions, although the world was in fear of war.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said racial harmony was one of the factors that contributed towards Malaysia's prosperity, economic growth and political stability. He said this should be maintained by all Malaysians so that the country could continue to progress.

"In this challenging world, we need to unite and have a positive and optimistic attitude," he said in his Chinese New Year message.

Ling, who is also Transport Minister, said this year's economic growth was expected to be higher, following some encouraging and positive signs.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu today expressed confidence that the Chinese community would continue to contribute to the economic growth of the nation.

"I also believe the community will continue to work and co-operate with the other races in the country to foster better understanding," he said.

He also said that regardless of the year they were born, everyone in Malaysia would continue to enjoy the comforts of life in the country's stable economy.

The Chinese will be ushering the Year of the Goat tomorrow, and they believe those born this year will be creative and enjoy the comforts of life.

He urged the people to attend open house to foster better relations among the races.

He also advised motorists returning to their hometowns to drive carefully.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said Malaysians should celebrate Chinese New Year by letting the misunderstandings and squabbles of the past year drift away.

"The year 2003 and the tranquillity it promises should also be a year to reflect and correct where we have gone wrong and to build on our successes as a nation and society."

Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister, said Malaysian Chinese for generations had been patriotic citizens and key pillars of the country, having contributed immensely over the years to societal development and growth.

"The community's solid backing and trust placed on the Barisan Nasional has also proven to be a good decision.

"Over the last 47 years, the Government's interethnic management policy has enhanced not only Malay and Chinese co-operation but also mutual understanding among all races," he said.

Pas acting president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, in his message, said the peace and racial tolerance enjoyed by Malaysians was due to the people's sincere and consistent struggle to ensure a safe future for the next generation.

"Let us benefit from this annual celebration of Chinese New Year to renew our friendship and understanding," he added.

Parti Rakyat Malaysia president Dr Syed Husin Ali, in his message, said everyone should resolve to work and pray hard for global peace, just and equitable socio-economic development, human rights and a united Malaysian nation free of ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts.

Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat called on the people to take the Chinese New Year celebration as an avenue to renew their fellowship and strengthen goodwill.

"Let us pray that this Chinese New Year will bring good health and continued success to all Malaysians regardless of race, religion and creed."

Chong, who will step down as Chief Minister on March 27 under the rotational system, thanked the people of Sabah for the understanding and support they had given him.