

31/08/2003

Wooring tourists to Chinatown

By Annie Freeda Cruz

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysia will promote Petaling Street, better known as Chinatown, as a tourist destination because of its unique features as a shopping haven, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said although Petaling Street has been given a facelift and developed into a consumer-tourist-friendly shopping area, it had not lost its originality as a Chinatown fully monopolised by Chinese businessmen.

The Prime Minister's last visit to Petaling Street was on Feb 22, 1992.

Chinatown has seen drastic changes and development. It was once a dirty place with high crime rate and used by drug addicts as a hideout.

"It is now clean and the stalls are well-organised. It has a well-built pavement with a roof to protect tourists and consumers from rain and scorching sun and businessmen, especially hawkers, are consumer-tourist-friendly," said Dr Mahathir, when addressing some 20,000 people at the Malaysia Community Mammoth Patriotic Gathering in Petaling Street.

The gathering was jointly organised by the Malaysia Garments Wholesale Merchants Association, Hawkers Association Kuala Lumpur and Federation of Nan Ann Association to mark the nation's 46th National Day celebrations.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, urged hawkers in Petaling Street to help keep the area clean.

He said the Government would continue to develop Petaling Street to make it more attractive.

"The Government is also proud that the Chinese business community has, for the past few years, actively participated in the Merdeka celebrations," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was a unique country because it comprised people of various races and religions who lived together in peace and harmony.

"We don't quarrel, but live, work and play together. This country is yours and mine. It is ours and we love it. When the people progress, they contribute towards national development," he added.

He said not all countries had peace and harmony.

"We were hit by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, economic and financial crises, but we recovered very quickly. Now tourists are back," Dr Mahathir said, adding that as long as all the races lived together in peace and harmony tourists would come to Malaysia.

He also took the opportunity to thank the people for giving their undivided support to the Government during his 22 years as Prime Minister.

(END)