

Celebrate unity in our diversity, urges Abdullah

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KUALA LUMPUR: The prime minister has called on Malaysians to build on the similarities that connect them and to celebrate unity in diversity.

Saying Malaysians should bridge the divide that separates them, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi reminded Malaysians never to forget that they shared the same future and destiny.

In his Christmas message, he said all Malaysians wanted to enjoy peace and harmony, as well as to express goodwill and extend friendship to one another.

"One way we can achieve this is by sharing the celebrations of fellow Malaysians across all racial and religious differences.

"Let us respect our differences, and at the same time strengthen and celebrate our unity in diversity.

"The goodwill in us must always be nurtured and practised," he said in the message released by the Prime Minister's Department.

In wishing Christians a Merry Christmas, Abdullah said that as prime minister, he had dedicated himself to creating a thriving, confident and progressive multi-racial society living in peace and harmony.

Meanwhile, MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, in his message, said that the nation needed to "take a direction of maturity", recognise the spirit of accommodation and to treat each and every social-religious issue "as if it is part of us — both the good and bad sides".

Ong said that in Malaysia, the celebration of religious events such as Christmas was also a celebration of the freedom to practise, to pray and to express openly the

respective faiths.

"This is important in keeping with the multi-cultural and multi-religious character of our social life," said Ong.

He said that despite the diverse cultures, ethnic groups and beliefs, "we have lived together in peace and harmony while retaining our differences".

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said other countries saw Malaysia as a model of a united and peaceful nation and everyone must work to maintain this image.

"While we celebrate, let us pray for the country's continued success. We must continue to strengthen race relations," he said.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said Christmas was a national celebration, and thus a testimony to the country's rich cultural and religious diver-

sity.

Dr Lim said that not many nations were blessed with what Malaysia had and urged all Malaysians to continue with the tradition of visiting friends during the celebration.

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, in wishing Christians a Merry Christmas, called for greater respect for non-Muslim rights.

The Christian Federation of Malaysia called on Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ by preaching love and healing the hearts of the afflicted.

"The churches will continue to work with a spirit of peace and goodwill with Malaysians of all ethnic and religious backgrounds in order to ensure our country continues to be just and progressive," its chairman, Bishop Dr Paul Tan, said.