

THE SUN

DATE: 27/12/2007

Beware of extremist elements, says PM

The Sun - 27/12/2007

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has reminded Malaysians not to allow extremist tendencies to take root and undermine inter-racial harmony.

The prime minister said the moderates should play a role in ensuring that members of the public were not swayed by extremist propaganda, which played on the people's emotions by raising sensitive religious and racial issues.

"I'm really concerned when issues involving religion are brought up from time to time and the immediate problems that all of us would need to

address. If moderates don't take centre stage, surely extremist elements will occupy it, making us fall for their extremist approach being touted as a religious or national approach," he said.

Abdullah said this at a Christmas tea party organised by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) and Kuala Lumpur Archbishop Datuk Murphy Pakiam here on Tuesday.

According to Bernama, the event was attended by about 200 guests, including Abdullah's wife Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, Housing and Local Government

Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen and Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Ong Tee Keat.

In his speech, Abdullah said bigger problems would crop up if unscrupulous people continued to peddle their extremist views.

"We do have a big responsibility to shoulder as we need to ensure our country remains safe and peaceful for our own mutual benefit," he said.

As a multi-racial country, Malaysia had come a long way to be where it is - a nation capable of bringing progress, peace and stability to its people, thanks to the sacrifices of all the races.

On the tea reception, Abdullah described the *muhabbah* (unity) spirit shown by people of various ethnic backgrounds, who came together to join in the Christmas celebrations, as a potent symbol of friendship that should be preserved.

Archbishop Pakiam was thankful that the government had always respected everyone's religious festivals and holidays.

He said this sort of camaraderie among the races was the very basis of Malaysia's nation-building.

The harmonious relationship among Malaysians has always been inspiring, he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said: "In a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society like Malaysia, the temptation to trespass on the rights and sensitivities of others will always be present. But as responsible Malaysians we must refrain from doing so."

Dompok, who is tasked with keeping the Prime Minister's Department abreast of the concerns faced by Christians in Malaysia, said this in his Christmas message released on Christmas eve on Monday.

"We are thankful to the Almighty that despite some recent setbacks, we live in peace and harmony," he said.