

PM: Work together to safeguard nation's peace

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi last night called on the people to deny extremists any room to influence, let alone dictate, the country's agenda.

The prime minister said all efforts must be founded on the objective of delivering benefits to all instead of caving in to pressures from a narrow-minded group.

"Each of us has the responsibility to safeguard the country from sliding into chaos arising from a right to the freedom of expression with no regard for the feelings and sensitivities of others," he said in his New Year message, which was televised nationwide.

Abdullah said the freedom of expression would be meaningless if it was not exercised with responsibility.

"We have seen the calamities and disasters which have befallen other countries as a consequence of the exercise of unrestricted freedom of expression."

The prime minister also touched on religious freedom, which has emerged as an issue over the past few months, and said: "We should deal with it with patience and caution and not allow ourselves to be influenced."

"We should take the stance of rejecting the adoption of extreme measures to arrive at solutions. This issue cannot be resolved through street demonstrations."

Abdullah said he believed that every Malaysian had the capacity to think and reason with wisdom and would never allow any ele-

ment "to undermine the harmony which we have established and nurtured for so long".

"Let us join hands to safeguard the peace and prosperity that we now enjoy. If there are shortcomings in implementation, let us strengthen the process with honesty and sincerity, for the sake of our beloved Malaysia."

He said the prevailing peace and harmony was the outcome of the goodwill, tolerance and moderation exercised by the people.

The prime minister said it was the goodwill, tolerance and moderation that had torn down the divisive barriers which had kept the people separated at one time in terms of race, religion or status.

"And, we do not merely perceive things from our point of view but also from the perspective of others."

"We do so as we understand that Malaysia does not belong to any one particular individual or race but to all of us, every Malaysian. In this country, no one is accorded a citizenry higher than another's."

Abdullah added that the country owed its prosperity to the goodwill, tolerance and moderation.

"I believe this is the spirit which will reject any extreme action that can only undermine our solidarity and threaten peace and prosperity."

Abdullah expressed his sympathy for the tens of thousands of victims of the recent floods, and said the catastrophe was a test of Allah (God), not only for the victims but

also the government.

He was grateful that during the floods, the compassionate nature of Malaysians and their eagerness to help the victims was very much evident.

"It has been like this every time a disaster occurs, wherever that may be, in towns or villages. This is what makes me proud of you, the people of Malaysia."

He expressed his gratitude to the police, army, and governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as the public who had assisted the flood victims.

Abdullah said Malaysia reached a number of successes last year, all achieved through the spirit of unity and togetherness.

He noted that the economy grew six per cent last year, supported by vibrant trade and an active stock market with inflation and unemployment under control.

In the development of human capital, Abdullah said, 2007 started off with the launch of the Education Development Blueprint in January followed by the National Higher Education Strategic Plan.

Abdullah said to ensure the country's development was equally shared, development corridors were launched in southern Johor and in northern and eastern parts of the peninsula.

He said the year also witnessed the caring nature of the government when it maintained the price of fuel despite escalating global prices and the monitoring of prices of essential goods to check a

rise in the cost of living.

On public security, the prime minister said the police would step up crime-prevention operations and was recruiting up to 60,000 personnel over the next five years to facilitate this.

He said the government had also taken measures to boost its delivery system with the setting up of Pemudah.

"As a token of appreciation and to strengthen the public service delivery system, the government announced salary increases of between 7.5 and 42 per cent for civil servants in July," he said.

Abdullah said 2007, which was also Malaysia's 50th anniversary of independence, had highlighted the country's success in numerous areas.

He said the greatest achievement for Malaysians in 2007 was the launch of the country's first angkasawan, who travelled to the International Space Station on Oct 10. Another is scheduled to go to space in 2010 or 2011.

Visit Malaysia Year 2007, he said, had attracted 20.7 million tourists, generating a revenue of RM45.7 billion, while in the sporting arena, the country's athletes won 68 gold medals at the Sea Games in Thailand.

On 2008, the prime minister said it promised 1,001 challenges as well as blessings for all, and called on everyone to co-operate to maintain peace and unity and bring greater progress for the country. — Bernama