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'Keep extremism out'

PM lauds spirit of cooperation in New Year message

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VIP event: Abdullah and his wife Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah (centre) accompanied by AmBank Group Chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim (in red cap), Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor (second from right) and Deputy Federal Territories Minister Datuk Wira Abu Seman Yusop (right).

PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called on the people to deny extremists the room to influence or dictate, the country's agenda.

The prime minister said all efforts must be founded on the objective of delivering benefits to all the people, instead of being mere reactions to pressure from a narrow-minded group.

"Each of us has the responsibility of safeguarding the country from sliding into chaos as a result of what is touted as freedom of expression with no regard for the feelings and sensitivities of others," he said in his 2008 New Year message televised nationwide.

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

"We have seen the calamities and disasters befalling other countries as a consequence of the exercise of unrestricted freedom of expression, purportedly assumed to be absolute," he said.

The prime minister also touched on religious freedom, which has emerged as an issue over the past few weeks, and said, "We should deal with it with patience and cau-

tion, 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 every Malaysian had the capacity to think and reason, and would not allow any element "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 together strengthen the process with honesty and sincerity, for the sake of our beloved Malaysia," he said.

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

The prime minister said this had torn down the divisive barriers that had once kept the people separated, in terms of race, religion and status.

"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," he said.

Abdullah also said this made Malaysia what it was today, a nation undergoing intensive development, and enjoying peace and prosperity.

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

Abdullah expressed his sympathy for the victims of the recent floods and said the catastrophe was a test of 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 were very much evident, rising above race, religion and social status.

"It has been like this every time a disaster occurs, whether in the towns or villages. This is what makes me proud of you, the people of Malaysia," he said. — Bernama