

Najib: Don't confuse cultural and religious beliefs
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PUTRAJAYA, Feb 15 — The prime minister addressed tonight the recent furore in certain quarters over his attendance of Thaipusam celebrations at Batu Caves earlier this month.

Bernama Online reported Datuk Seri Najib Razak as saying continuous efforts at promoting understanding and awareness through discussion, dialogue and education are imperative because they would allow Malaysians to understand the differences and the similarities between the various races in the country.

He also said Malaysians should have a clear understanding about what constitutes cultural beliefs vis-à-vis religious ones and that the committee tasked with interfaith understanding had an important role to play in this regard.

He cited as an example criticism over his donning of a traditional kurta for the Thaipusam celebrations at Batu Caves.

The news portal quoted Najib as saying, "...they are not aware that in India, millions of Indians, who are Muslims, wear the kurta daily. Are they then not Muslims?"

Najib also described the clothes usually worn by Malaysian Chinese Muslims Association (MACMA) president Datuk Mustapha Ma, who is a seventh-generation Muslim, to official functions.

These garments have Chinese cultural elements, which should not be linked to the question of faith, Najib said before adding, "If we don't understand [issues like these], this could lead to suspicion and hatred among the races."

The prime minister also stressed that the government's policies are based on the wasatiyah ("moderation" in Arabic) concept as found in Islam, which highlights the need to respect those who practise other faiths.

On February 10, Perak Mufti Tan Sri Harussani Zakaria expressed dismay over Datuk Seri Najib Razak's decision to "sacrifice his faith" to attend the said celebrations, saying his presence was against Islamic doctrine.

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