

PM: Kongsi Raya not a religious gathering

NST-1716/2006

■ By V. Vasudevan
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Kongsi Raya celebrations and open houses will continue to be organised as they are social gatherings and not religious festivals.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the gatherings were devoid of religious rituals and showcased arts and cultural performances which depicted Malaysia's multi-racial society.

"The celebrations have been going on very well and have not created any problems among the various races.

"They are not spiritual festivals but social gatherings without any religious rituals and customs," he said after chairing the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting yesterday.

On Tuesday, the Ulama Conference 2006 working committee chairman Datuk Seri Harussani Zakaria said the meeting sought to get the Government to review Kongsi Raya and National Open House festivals to ensure these gatherings did not contradict Islam.

The ulama's call followed the National Fatwa Council's decision that celebrating the festivals of other religions could erode Muslims' faith and lead to blasphemy.

Abdullah yesterday stressed that events organised in conjunction with the gatherings were cultural in nature.

Abdullah cited the recent Open House to celebrate the Harvest



Abdullah chairing the Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting in PWTC yesterday.

festival in Sabah as an example.

"There were no religious rituals which I think, for me at least, will erode our Islamic faith," he said.

Abdullah pointed out that Kongsi Raya celebrations have become a popular and favourite social event for Malaysians.

"Based on this, I think we should continue with them as long as they are not religious gather-

ings.

"The same goes for the Hari Raya Open House, which is a social gathering," he said.

He equated the Kongsi Raya gatherings to the open houses hosted by Malaysians in conjunction with the various festivals like Hari Raya and Deepavali.

"This is like holding an open house during Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Visitors come to wish us *Selamat*

Hari Raya and if it is Chinese New Year, we wish the Chinese, *Happy Chinese New Year*. Similarly with Deepavali, we wish our Hindu friends, *Happy Deepavali*," he said.

Abdullah also stressed that the Government had discussed the merits of holding the Kongsi Raya celebrations in Cabinet when the idea was first mooted before deciding to host them.