

Nothing wrong in visits, festive greetings: PM

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PUTRAJAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday there is nothing wrong if Muslims extend seasonal greetings or visit Hindus and the Chinese during Deepavali and Chinese New Year as this would not affect their Muslim faith.

Without making reference to any party or individual, he said: "I have been hearing a lot of things lately on this. To make it clear ... this does not *langgar aqidah* (break the faith) of the Muslim people if they were to do that."

He was speaking to reporters before presenting Hari Raya Puasa and Deepavali goodies to staff in the Prime Minister's Department, an initiative started by the late Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.

Abdullah said although terms like *Kongsi Raya* and *Raya Bersama* referred to the mingling of different races with different religious beliefs, "this does not mean a Muslim has to go to a temple or a Hindu has to go to a mosque ... there is no such thing".

He said it was just coincidence that sometimes the festive celebrations of certain races were close to Hari Raya, and the celebrations were held together in the spirit of closeness and unity.

"Those who are Muslims and Hindus will uphold and practise what is required under their respective religion with responsibility," he said.

Abdullah also said it was not wrong for Muslims and Hindus to visit each other during their festive celebrations.

"There is nothing wrong at all and there is no link to one smearing one's religion or belief.

"This (visiting others), is a Malaysian tradition involving a multi-racial society, which brings about harmony and unity," he said.

On Tuesday, Takaful Malaysia Bhd's Syariah department head Mohd Fauzi Mustaffa apologised to all parties if an e-mail he sent on Oct 5, asking Muslim staff not to wish Hindus Happy Deepavali, Happy Lakshmi Pooja and Happy Deepavali because this was deemed blasphemous and unIslamic, had offended their feelings.

He further stated that the contents were his personal opinion and did not reflect the views of the company.

The issue had sparked a furor among Hindus and other parties.

Takaful Malaysia, which has said following the outcry that the e-mail was not the company's official advice, is placing a full-page Deepavali greeting to Hindu devotees in *theSun* tomorrow.

The full-colour advertisement reads: "Takaful Malaysia wishes all Malaysians a Happy Deepavali".

Our article yesterday titled "Takaful unit head makes public apology" had erroneously said Mohd Fauzi's e-mail had echoed a call by the Perak mufti to refrain from wishing Happy Deepavali to Hindus.

It should have read his decision to apologise came

following the views of the Perak and Selangor muftis published in the *New Sunday Times* on Oct 15, who said it was not blasphemous to extend such greetings.