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Spirit of unity in diversity: The bedrock of Sabah's stability

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KOTA KINABALU: Behind Sabah's rich diversity of races, cultures and beliefs is a deeply rooted spirit of unity, nurtured by its people over generations.

Harmony among various ethnic communities is a key asset in ensuring national stability. In Sabah, the coexistence of more than 30 ethnic groups, underpinned by tolerance and mutual respect, has fostered a united society.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah senior lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Romzi Ationg said strong social bonds among ethnic groups such as the Kadazandusun, Bajau, Murut, Chinese, and Malays form the backbone of the state's stability.

"When inter-ethnic relations are preserved through tolerance and mutual respect, the risk of conflict can be minimised.

"This, in turn, creates a safe and conducive social environment for sustainable development," he told Bernama in conjunction with the 2026 National Day and Malaysia Day celebrations.

Romzi said ethnic harmony also stimulates economic activities and the tourism sector, while contributing to the emotional well-being of the community through continuous and inclusive unity programmes at the community and educational institution levels.

"Cross-cultural activities can reduce stereotypes and nurture a generation that values diversity as a shared strength.

"The Madani Government's inclusive development also ensures every ethnic group enjoys equal opportunities through fair access to education and targeted assistance," he said.

Meanwhile, Sabah Geopolitical and Electoral Research Unit researcher Assoc Prof Dr Syahrudin Awang Ahmad said Sabah's ethnic harmony is a unique asset in building a resilient social ecosystem.

From an economic perspective, he said the ability of the state's multi-ethnic communities to maintain peace is a major draw for foreign direct investment, given its very low security risks.

"The diversity of languages, including Malay, English, Mandarin and local ethnic languages, also enhances the competitiveness of the state's human capital at the international level," he said.

Syahrudin said social stability enables the government to channel national funds more effectively towards developing modern infrastructure, while the practice of celebrating festivals together fosters an inclusive neighbourly spirit and enhances productivity as well as family harmony.

Checks by Bernama at several housing estates and villages near here found that inter-ethnic unity remains a way of life, with residents of various ethnic backgrounds living harmoniously and respecting one another.

Simon Ganjun, the village chief of Kampung Lapanan in Telipok, said the village's multi-ethnic residents always work together to ensure the success of community programmes.

"Volunteer activities such as gotong-royong help bridge communication gaps among neighbours of different ethnic backgrounds. I hope more unity programmes by the Madani Government will be organised in this area," he said.

Sharing the same sentiment, Kapayan-based small trader Esther Monjikon, 42, said harmony among the various ethnic communities in her neighbourhood has long been fostered through the practice of neighbours helping one another and celebrating festivals together.

"The harmonious way of life in Sabah should serve as a model for national unity in line with the spirit of Malaysia Madani, as this social stability gives people a sense of security and peace of mind to work and raise their families," she said. — Bernama