

DR M: WE WON'T FORCE OTHERS TO BE MUSLIMS

DEC 1989

BUTTERWORTH, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad assured non-Muslims today that they will not be forced to embrace Islam.

The Prime Minister said such fears were unfounded because there had not been anyone who had been forced to convert to Islam.

"There has been no case of the Government forcing followers of other faiths to accept Islam," Dr Mahathir said when opening the Mesjid Jamek Pongsu Seribu in Kepala Batas near here.

"If anyone embraces Islam, it is of his own choosing. Other communities should not be afraid of us. This is very important in

a **multiracial** country because this is the way to achieve peace not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslims," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had no intention to **convert non-Muslims** because Malaysia was a multiracial and multi-religious society.

"Muslims will not use force or create trouble for others. Instead, they will lead by setting a good example and be fair to them because Islam is a tolerant religion," he said.

Non-Muslims, he added, should also try to understand Islam and not regard Muslims as enemies.

During the British colonial rule, he said, missionary schools stipulated

conversion to their religion as a condition to obtain scholarships.

"But since the Government came into power, we have opened the schools and given scholarships to all races without any condition," he added.

Later, when addressing some 3,000 Umno members at the Permatang Pauh Umno division building here, Dr Mahathir spoke on the same issue.

He said non-Malays should not worry about being forced to embrace Islam because Umno was the backbone of the Government, and Umno members, being followers of the true Islamic faith, were tolerant of other re-

ligions.

"If we had wanted to impose forced conversion, we would have done so many years ago. Since independence, we have not been interested in forcing people to embrace Islam and we are not interested in doing so now."

Dr Mahathir said he was "sad and hurt" to hear of such allegations.

"Our record speaks for itself. We live in a multiracial country and we have been fair to all since independence. The people should treasure this environment instead of making allegations which can generate confusion and suspicion," he said. "We have no interest in persecuting anyone. That is

why our country is **peaceful and progressive.**"

Dr Mahathir said Umno included the interests of other communities in its struggle and was honest in its dealings with them.

"We do not take what belongs to them and they do not take what belongs to us. The Malays are only asking for a bit more so that we can also enjoy the riches of this country.

"The people should ask themselves this question: Would our country be this peaceful and progressive if not for Umno? If they are really honest, they would have to acknowledge that because of Umno, they are enjoying peace and progress today," he said.