

D186

U E367 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION

KUALA LUMPUR, APRIL 10<sup>90</sup> (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES SHOULD BE SETTLED THROUGH DISCUSSIONS AND NOT BY REFERRING SUCH MATTERS TO THE PUBLIC FOR SUPPORT.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THERE WOULD ALWAYS BE PROBLEMS REGARDING RELIGION IN MALAYSIA BECAUSE +THE PEOPLE ARE VERY SENSITIVE AND THIS IS A MULTI-RELIGIOUS COUNTRY+.

HOWEVER, HE POINTED OUT, THE IMPORTANT THING WAS THE MANNER OF SETTLING THESE DIFFERENCES.

+IT SHOULD NOT BE BY REFERENCE TO THE PUBLIC,+ HE TOLD REPORTERS AFTER A TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE MALAYSIAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL OF BUDDHISM, CHRISTIANITY, HINDUISM AND SIKHISM AT HIS OFFICE HERE.

THE COUNCIL HAD REQUESTED A MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER HE URGED IT LAST MONTH IN PARLIAMENT TO IMMEDIATELY HALT ITS SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN WHICH DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR FEARED COULD INCITE RACIAL ILL-FEELINGS.

THE CAMPAIGN WAS LAUNCHED AGAINST ISLAMIC LAWS IN THE COUNTRY, THE SELANGOR ISLAMIC ENACTMENT ADMINISTRATION ACT, THE TELECAST OF ISLAMIC PROGRAMMES ON THE RADIO AND TELEVISION AND THE TEACHING OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION IN UNIVERSITIES. THE CAMPAIGN WAS SUPPORTED BY THE DAP.

+WHEN YOU GO TO THE PUBLIC AND ASK THE PUBLIC TO SIGN AND GIVE THEIR SUPPORT, THEN YOU'RE ASKING THE PUBLIC TO RESOLVE THE MATTER,+ HE SAID. +THAT WOULD NOT HELP AT ALL. -- MORE  
1641MST 10 04 90

D187

U E568 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 2 KUALA LUMPUR

+... IF YOU GO TO THE PUBLIC WITH YOUR RELIGION, MUSLIMS ALSO CAN GO TO THE PUBLIC WITH THEIR RELIGION. ARE WE GOING TO RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM BY MEANS OF VOTES?+ HE ASKED.

+CERTAINLY NOT,+ HE SAID. +SO, DON'T HAVE THIS APPROACH. IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, LET'S DISCUSS. THE GOVERNMENT IS AN OPEN GOVERNMENT, WE CAN DISCUSS+.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE EMPHASISED DURING THE MEETING THAT MALAYSIANS HAD BEEN TOLERANT OF EACH OTHER'S RELIGION AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO RELIGIOUS CLASHES. -- MORE

1643MST 10 04 90

D220

U E585 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 3 KUALA LUMPUR (RPTING CORRECTING LAST LINE)

HE SAID THE RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN MALAYSIA WAS DUE TO THE COUNTRY BEING VERY LIBERAL ON RELIGION WITH ALL KINDS OF PLACES OF WORSHIP BEING ESTABLISHED.

+NOT PERFECT HARMONY, PERHAPS, BUT ACTUALLY MUCH BETTER THAN FOUND IN SOME OTHER COUNTRY WHERE DIFFERENT RELIGIONS ARE ALWAYS AT EACH OTHER'S THROAT,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID TO PRESERVE RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN MALAYSIA, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT FOLLOWERS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS DID NOT CONDUCT CAMPAIGNS BASED ON RELIGION, MAKE AN ISSUE OF RELIGION OR DID ANYTHING TO STIR UP EXTREME RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

HE SAID THE COUNCIL HAD, IN THE MEETING, AGREED WITH HIS VIEWS AND EXPRESSED ITS SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE COUNCIL HAD RAISED ITS CONCERN ABOUT CONVERSION OF NON-MUSLIM CHILDREN TO ISLAM, CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS WHICH THEY BELIEVED WERE PLACED ON THE PRACTICE OF THEIR RELIGION, THE USE OF BAHASA MALAYSIA AND INSUFFICIENT AIR-TIME FOR RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMES. -- MORE

1745MST 10 04 90

D198

U E578 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 4 KUALA LUMPUR

DESCRIBING THE MEETING WITH THE COUNCIL AS CORDIAL, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE POINTED OUT THE SPECIAL POSITION OF ISLAM IN THE COUNTRY AND THE FREEDOM TO PRACTISE OTHER RELIGIONS AS ENSHRINED IN THE CONSTITUTION.

ON COVERSION OF MINORS TO ISLAM, HE SAID THAT DESPITE ISLAM BEING THE NATIONAL RELIGION AND THE LARGE MUSLIM POPULATION, THERE WAS ONLY A MINIMUM OF CONVERSIONS TO ISLAM WHILE CONVERSION TO OTHER RELIGIONS WAS ALSO TAKING PLACE AMONG THE NON-MUSLIM COMMUNITY.

+WE ARE NOT ACTIVE IN THAT FIELD SO THERE IS NO REASON FOR ANYBODY TO FEAR,+ HE ADDED.

+IT IS NOT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TO FORCIBLY CONVERT ANYBODY AND THIS HAS BEEN SHOWN BY OUR RECORD,+ HE SAID, ADDING THAT HE TOLD THE COUNCIL IT SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE SENSITIVITY OF THIS PROBLEM AND NOT DO ANYTHING THAT MIGHT CREATE TENSION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT FAITHS.

HE SAID IF NON-MUSLIMS HAD ANY PROBLEMS ON THIS ISSUE, THEY COULD ALWAYS GO TO COURT, REFERRING TO LAST MONTH'S RULING ON SUSIE TEH'S CASE IN KOTA BAHARU BY THE SUPREME COURT THAT NON-MUSLIMS BELOW THE AGE OF 18 DID NOT HAVE THE RIGHT UNDER CIVIL LAW TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN RELIGION. -- MORE

1706MST 10 04 90

D221

U E586 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 5 KUALA LUMPUR

THE SELANGOR ENACTMENT PROVIDES THAT CHILDREN REACHING THE AGE OF PUBERTY ACCORDING TO SYARIAH LAW HAVE THE RIGHT TO DECIDE THEIR RELIGION.

TO A QUESTION, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE SUPREME COURT'S DECISION DID NOT SUPERSEDE ENACTMENTS BY STATES BECAUSE THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION REMAINED SUPREME AND THAT ANY INTERPRETATION MUST BE RELEVANT TO THE CONSTITUTION.

HE SAID HE TOLD THE COUNCIL THAT THE COURT HAD ALREADY DECIDED ON THE CONVERSION ISSUE AND THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT WISH TO INTERFERE WITH THE COURT.

+WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF EXTENDING SYARIAH LAW TO THE NON-MUSLIMS. WE HAVE SHOWN THIS MANY TIMES BEFORE. FOR EXAMPLE IN CASES OF KHALWAT WHERE NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AGAINST NON-MUSLIM PARTIES,+ HE ADDED.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE TOLD THE COUNCIL THAT THERE HAD BEEN ONLY ONE OR TWO CASES WHERE CHILDREN HAD BEEN +STOLEN+ FOR CONVERSION TO ISLAM.

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1747MST 10 04 90

D222

U E587 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 6 KUALA LUMPUR

+I THINK THEY UNDERSTAND NOW THAT I HAVE TOLD THEM THEY HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR,+ HE SAID, ADDING THAT THE COUNCIL HAD ALREADY CALLED OFF ITS SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN.

+AS FAR AS ISLAMIC LAW IS CONCERNED IN THIS COUNTRY, IT APPLIES ONLY TO MUSLIMS. IT IS NOT THE LAW FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY. IF A PERSON IS NOT A MUSLIM, HE WILL NOT BE AFFECTED,+ HE SAID.

REFERRING TO RELIGIOUS PUBLICATIONS IN BAHASA MALAYSIA, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID CARE MUST BE TAKEN THAT MUSLIMS COULD NOT BE EXPOSED TO THE TEACHING OF OTHER RELIGIONS THROUGH THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE.

HE SAID ISLAM HAD BEEN PROTECTED IN THE COUNTRY SINCE COLONIAL DAYS WHEN THE BRITISH ACCEPTED THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO BRAND OF OTHER RELIGION AMONG MUSLIMS.

+THAT IS WHY WE INSIST THAT WHEN THEY PRODUCE ANY RELIGIOUS TEXTS THEY MUST MENTION THAT IT IS NOT FOR MUSLIMS. THEY MUST SAY THAT THIS IS FOR CHRISTIANS ONLY OR FOR HINDUS ONLY. THEY MUST BE VERY CLEAR THAT IT IS NOT FOR MUSLIMS,+ HE SAID. -- MORE  
1749MST 10 04 90

D223

U E589 AAE  
MAHATHIR - RELIGION 7 KUALA LUMPUR

+WHAT WE DON'T WANT THEM TO DO IS TO DELIBERATELY TRY TO INFLUENCE MUSLIMS BY MAKING OR PUBLISHING SOMETHING THAT IS VERY BIG,+ HE SAID, ADDING THAT MUSLIMS ALSO FEARED THEIR CHILDREN BEING CONVERTED TO OTHER RELIGION AS MUCH AS NON-MUSLIMS.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID HE HAD PROMISED TO STUDY THE COUNCIL'S COMPLAINTS AND TO CONSIDER ITS REQUEST FOR FOREIGN PRIESTS TO BE ALLOWED INTO THE COUNTRY TO MEET A SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS.

THE PRIME MINISTER CLAIMED THE DAP, IN EXPECTING SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN, HAD MADE IT INTO A POLITICAL ISSUE AND THIS WAS WHAT THE GOVERNMENT WANTED TO AVOID.

HE ADDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD EVEN URGED PAS NOT TO CREATE POLITICAL ISSUE OUT OF RELIGION. -- BERNAMA  
1750MST 10 04 90

D224