

19/02/1997

Towards a more tolerant society (HL)

Syed Nadzri; Joseph Bingkasan; Joniston Bangkuai

KOTA KINABALU, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, obviously satisfied with the outcome of a two-hour meeting he had with Sabah church leaders, said the encounter would further promote religious understanding and tolerance in the country.

Dr Mahathir emerged from his meeting with 13 representatives from different church denominations looking very pleased and said the outcome was a positive one that benefited everybody.

The same sentiment was expressed by the president of the Sabah Council of Churches, Datuk Arun Selutan, who was full of praise for the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir, who was on an overnight visit to Sabah, told reporters later that the meeting was one way of establishing understanding between the church and the Government, paving the way for a more tolerant society.

Those who attended the meeting held at the Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort included leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Basel Church, Methodist Church and Baptist Church.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting was held to also explain the Government's policies and the meaning of religious freedom.

"I explained the importance of being tolerant and that all of us must remember that our country is multi-religious, so everyone must be tolerant of one another.

"I found that they were very positive in accepting the Government's policies and I think the meeting benefited both sides."

Selutan said Dr Mahathir advised members of the council to continue playing a significant role in enhancing religious and racial tolerance.

Selutan, a leader of the Borneo Evangelical Mission, said Dr Mahathir spoke at length about the prevailing harmony and tolerance among the people in Malaysia.

He said the Prime Minister drew attention to Malaysia having become the envy of many nations because of the strong unity and bond of friendship among its multi-racial and multi-religious society.

"Dr Mahathir told us that it was his fervent hope to see the people, irrespective of race and religion, continue living in harmony," Selutan said.

He added that Dr Mahathir also spoke about the many difficulties faced by other countries over race and religious relations.

Expressing the council's gratitude to the Prime Minister for taking time off for the meeting, Selutan said Dr Mahathir gave an assurance that religious freedom in Malaysia would continue to remain.

Before the meeting, the Prime Minister met Sabah Umno leaders over breakfast.

Dr Mahathir said discussions centred on how Sabah Umno could play its role effectively towards realising the party's struggle.

"Sabah Umno is the youngest among all the States. So, I took the opportunity to remind them of their duties so that they could understand the party's philosophy better," he added.

(END)