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Trinidad to restructure Muslim society on Malaysian experience

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Malaysian experience in uplifting the status of the Malays from abject poverty after independence can be a "perfect model" for the restructuring of the Muslim community in Trinidad.

Islamic Resource Society head Bilaal Sayyid Abdullah said the Bumiputera status accorded to the Malays had played a significant role in placing the community on par with other ethnic races who were better-off economically.

There must be fair and equitable distribution of wealth between all ethnic groups especially in a multi-ethnic society, he said.

No single ethnic group, he said, must be suppressed as it could give rise to hostility which would in turn, encourage aggression and later lead to political instability in the country.

"In addition, the various land resettlement and rural development schemes that were carried out successfully by Risda and Felda has also enhanced the lives of the Malay community here," he said.

Bilaal, 44, said this to the New Straits Times at the end of his two-week familiarisation visit here at the invitation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

His objective - raise funds to carry out relief programmes to build a memorial for black Muslim activist Malcolm X in New York, to buy copies of the Quran, and seek economic and technical co-operation.

It was arranged by the Prime Minister's Department and Muslim Youths Movement of Malaysia.

Bilaal said the Malaysian government had also successfully integrated its multi-ethnic groups and encouraged joint-participation in the country's development.

People from different backgrounds will normally compete with each other in a multi-ethnic society but Malaysians are very tolerant towards each other despite their different faiths.

"Such efforts are worthy of emulation in my country," he said.

"We must respect each other to find a place for our religion especially in a multi-ethnic society".

About 12 per cent of Trinidad's 1.3 million population comprise 130,000 Muslims with the rest mainly of Indian, Arab and European origins.

Bilaal said about 30 per cent of Trinidad's Muslim community were below the poverty level.

"We are learning to be tolerant of other's religions and cultures," he said.

"Although there are racial sentiments, we have no choice but to deal with it as ours is a mixed society like Malaysia".

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