

06/01/2000

Continued help for Thailand's Muslims

JITRA, Wed. - Malaysia will continue to assist Muslims living in the five Southern provinces of Thailand without interfering in domestic Thai politics, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said Malaysia would help Muslims living in the provinces of Satun, Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani and Songkhla to the best of its ability in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood.

Dr Mahathir said the livelihood of Muslims in Southern Thailand had improved over the years and some are already holding important posts.

"We still like to extend our assistance... it is not our intention to be involved in Thailand's politics.

"Since we have the capability, we want to help... we will open more opportunities for their children to study in our country," he said in his speech before breaking fast at the Kampung Bukit mosque in Hosba, Kubang Pasu.

Sixty imams and religious officers from the five Thai provinces joined in the breaking of fast with Dr Mahathir and the villagers.

Dr Mahathir also said ulamak and community leaders in the northern States bordering Thailand should make visits to the provinces to foster closer ties.

"In this village, there are many people who speak the Thai language and many of the imams from Thailand who are with us today also speak Bahasa Melayu.

"This factor makes it easier for us to communicate and maintain closer ties," he added.

Dr Mahathir also urged Muslims to understand the basics of Islam so that they would not be swayed by the teachings of groups with political motives.

"Without proper understanding of Islam, Muslims could easily be influenced by teachings that are against the true meaning of Islam," he said, adding that this may affect their faith.

Also present were Menteri Besar Datuk Syed Razak Syed Zain, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali.

Dr Siti Hasmah also presented educational aid to 20 students before breaking fast.

(END)