

29 NOV 2001

Fasting-Unique/Pix

UNIQUE "BREAKING OF FAST" EXPERIENCE FOR NON-MUSLIMS

By: Harlina Samson

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 29 (Bernama) -- Representatives of several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-Muslim religious bodies enjoyed a unique "breaking of fast" with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad at the Seri Perdana here tonight.

According to most of the 264 guests at the function, this was the first "buka puasa" that they had ever attended and they expressed their happiness for being honoured by the Prime Minister at the function.

This was also a very unique occasion which happened in the country, several of the guests said, adding that it had allowed them a closer view of the Muslims' religious way of life.

Rev Tan Sri Dr Ling Cheng Ean of the Malaysian Christian Federation thanked Dr Mahathir for inviting the non-Muslims to the function.

"We feel (being) part of the Malaysian family and are very much at home. It is a proud thing that we don't see in many other places.

"We thanked the Prime Minister for this invitation," he said when approached by reporters after the breaking of fast at the Seri Perdana Banquet Hall here today.

Dr Ling who was accompanied by two other members of the federation said the move enabled the non-Muslims to have better understanding, relations and friendship with the Muslim community.

Malaysian Indians' federation of chambers for commerce and industry representative S. Vellusamy said he was honoured to be invited to the function, the first held in the Malaysian history.

"We are happy as the Prime Minister himself invited us for the breaking of fast. This is unique and the first created in Malaysian history," said Vellusamy who attended the function with six other members of the federation.

A representative from the Sikh community, Mohon Singh said he too was honoured by Dr Mahathir's invitation.

"It gives us (the non-Muslim) the opportunity to know, understand and clarify any doubts about Islam," he said.

While waiting for the Muslims to perform their Maghrib prayers, Mohon said the non-Muslims were discussing with each other on Malaysia's unique multi-racial and multi-religious structure which allowed its people to live in harmony.

"We see the beautiful mosque (Masjid Putra) and its surroundings. We should sell this uniqueness of Malaysia to the world," he said.

Federation of Malaysian Chinese Associations' honorary secretary-general Wong Shak Tong said the event was something "extraordinary" as it enabled the non-Muslims to interact, exchange views and enhance their friendship with their Muslim counterparts.

"We support the invitation (of non-Muslims) as it can further bolster the 'muhibah' spirit and unity among Malaysians," he said.

Thanking Dr Mahathir for the invitation, Wong said he hoped to attend similar functions in the future.

Among those who were present at the function were the Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, deputy ministers, parliamentary secretaries and department heads.

Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Leo Michael Toyad, Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy, Deputy Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs

Minister Datuk S. Subramaniam and Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Peter Chin Fah Kui were among the non-Muslim deputy ministers who were present.

Dr Mahathir later performed the Isyak and Tarawih prayers together with the other Muslim guests, led by the Grand Imam of Cairo's Ibnu Has Mosque, Sheikh Muhammad Gibril.

-- BERNAMA

HS HS ZUL