

Catholic Church lauds PM-Pope meeting

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PETALING JAYA: The Catholic Church of Malaysia is glad that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be meeting Pope John Paul II at the Vatican next month.

"Our prime minister is virtually recognised as the leader of the Muslim world and his views are much sought after by world leaders," Auxiliary Bishop of Kuala Lumpur Rt. Rev Murphy Pakiam told *The Sun* on Saturday.

"The Holy Father too is a moral leader in the world, whose wisdom and thoughts are given consideration by nations of the world."

Pakiam said it is significant and important that these two leaders meet and exchange views and friendship and be in solidarity for world peace and harmony.

There are 770,000 Catholics in Malaysia.

Pakiam also said it is notable that most world nations including Muslim countries have diplomatic ties with the Vatican and so far Malaysia is an outstanding exception.

He hopes the meeting would result in permanent ties.

The vice-president of the Bishop's Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, Archbishop Jon Lee described the upcoming meeting between Mahathir and the Pope as a "good step" which can lead to enhanced relations between both countries.

Lee, who is Archbishop of Kota Kinabalu, said there will be greater understanding of inter-faith relations between Muslims and Christians.

International Movement For A Just World president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said PM's visit will be an opportunity to enter into dialogue with the Pope on not only religious issues but also common political, economic and social concerns.

"It is important for leaders from different religious backgrounds to talk to one another about critical global challenges that are impacting the lives of everyone," Chandra said.

"The Pope and other Church leaders have been actively engaged in inter-faith dialogues since the early 1960s," he added.