

Dr Mahathir confirms receiving invite from the Pope

STAR 2 5 MAY 2002

PETALING JAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has confirmed receiving an invitation to visit the Vatican from Pope John Paul.

"I will brief the Cabinet about it," the Prime Minister said when asked about the report that he had been invited to meet with the Pope.

It was reported that if the meeting took place, it would coincide with Dr Mahathir's visit to Switzerland and Luxembourg next month.

The news of the Pope's invitation has been favourably received by religious groups, non-governmental organisations and political groups.

Auxiliary Bishop of Kuala Lumpur Rt Rev Murphy Pakiam said the meeting would be both significant and important, that the two leaders meet and exchange views and friendship besides being in solidarity for world peace and harmony.

"It is notable that most nations in the world, including Muslim countries, have diplomatic ties with the Vatican," he said yesterday.

He also hoped that further ties between the two leaders would be fostered on a permanent basis as a result of the meeting.

"Today, our Prime Minister is recognised as a leader of the Muslim world and his views are much sought after. The Holy Father (the Pope) too is virtually the moral leader in the world, sought after by many dignitaries and world leaders."

International Movement for a Just World president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said the meeting will not only be in harmony with Islamic principles and practices but also a step forward in the long journey to strengthen ties among people of different faiths in Malaysia and the world.

He said the visit made sense for a variety of reasons as a small but significant Catholic minority has been part of multi-religious Malaysia for centuries.