

28 MAY 2002

Mahathir-Pope

PM TO RAISE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN MEETING WITH THE POPE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he will raise the Palestinian issue in his meeting with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican City next month.

He said that the Palestinian problem does not only affect Muslims but also Christians.

"Their church has also been under siege, making it difficult for them to carry out their religious obligations," he told reporters after the ground-breaking of the proposed Bakti community centre project in Bukit Kiara here.

Asked on issues to be raised during his meeting with the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Dr Mahathir said that he would raise various issues including the Palestinian issue.

The prime minister said that he received the invitation from the Pope some time ago and would inform the Cabinet of his acceptance at its meeting tomorrow.

The meeting is expected to take place in conjunction with his visit to Switzerland and Luxembourg from June 9 to 12.

Asked on the support for his Vatican visit by Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, who is PAS' spiritual leader, Dr Mahathir said that he was grateful that the matter had not been politicised.

He said: "The visit is not for political purpose but to benefit the Palestinians and Muslims in general."

Nik Aziz was reported to have said that the meeting would be an opportunity to clarify various issues on Islam and Malaysia's stand on such issues.

The proposed Bakti community centre project is being undertaken at a 0.8-ha site and expected to be completed in 12 months.

Present at the ceremony were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, who is Bakti president, and wives of ministers and deputy ministers who are members of Bakti, the charity body of wives of ministers and deputy ministers.

-- BERNAMA

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