

Bishop calls on PM to match words with deeds

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Catholic Bishop Dr Paul Tan Chee Ing said citizens of goodwill would not hesitate to support Prime Minister Najib Razak's push for moderation if the latter himself was unequivocal in matching deed to word.

Citing examples over the past year where he said Christians have been "unjustifiably accused of a host of deeds that contravene inter-religious harmony," he said the PM chose not to display his vaunted moderation when "that very quality would have gone a long distance in pacifying the situation."

Commenting on the PM's remarks to an international convention of the Global Movement of Moderates in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the head of the Catholic Church in the Melaka-Johor diocese said:

bishop paul tan chee ing "You have to excuse me for the use of what may seem an oxymoronic expression that the prime minister has to be immoderate in his push for moderation.

"This way he will correct a deficit in our existing status as a people and a nation of moderates. We were once that way, but not now."

Najib had told the convention that Malaysia has always striven for moderation which made for harmony within its diversity.

Bishop Tan, who is also president of the Conference of Catholics Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, said Najib was "papering over current discord with a past that was harmonious" and that this was a "poor way of boosting moderation and combating extremism."

"A better way to go about promoting moderation is to candidly admit that the country has lost its previous moderate ways and retrace its steps towards restoration of the status quo ante," asserted the Jesuit-trained prelate.

Najib pays lip service to moderation

According to Bishop Tan, our founding fathers knew the difficulty of uniting a country composed of different races and belief systems.

"They plumbed for a democratic system into which was interwoven a transient programme for raising the standard of living of the underprivileged so that a level-playing field would soon be obtained among all its citizens," opined the prelate.

"But what has happened is that gross deviations in policy implementation have resulted in great inequalities in wealth and in opportunity, causing discontentment.

"In these straits, racial and religious demagogues have risen to fracture our society into its constituent factions so as to enhance their power and privileges," elaborated the bishop.

"This is where the prime minister has to be immoderate in his push for moderation, by setting his face unequivocally against the demagogues which would then encourage the people of goodwill and moderation to come to the fore.

"Paying lip service to moderation while leaving demagogues unchallenged would only invite cynicism.

“The prime minister has to match unequivocal deed to his moderate word and resist the temptation to subsume discordant present realities under a concordant past that is now beyond retrieval,” added the bishop.

“Nostalgia is fine but a sentimental attitude is not helpful in dealing with the threats to its well-being that our nation faces.”

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