

PM vows full consultation with churches on Christian issues

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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 4 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak promised national Christian leaders today full consultation over mission school heads and Bible knowledge classes as well as tax-exemption status to the faith's organisations in a bid to repair relations between the state and local churches.

The prime minister made the pledges at a closed-door luncheon today at Seri Perdana with Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) leaders, who represent over 90 per cent of the established denominations nationwide.

"On the appointment of principals of mission schools, the Ministry of Education will adhere to the practice of full engagement and consultation with the respective school boards concerned so that the principals appointed would be suitable and acceptable.

"On Bible Knowledge as an examination subject for the SPM, it will be taught in schools after school hours, on request by parents," said national unity minister, Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon in a media statement.

He added that if suitable religious teachers were unavailable at the school concerned, the Education Ministry will recruit a pastor or priest from a nearby church for the job.

The senator said the PM had announced that tax-exemption status for donations would be granted to religious organisations in his Budget 2012 speech last year, and was now looking into seeing it through.

A "proper procedure will be set up whereby donations to churches recognised and certified by the Christian Federation of Malaysia will be given tax-exemption," he said.

Koh said the issues were decided by the Cabinet in a meeting held earlier today.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and 13 other Cabinet ministers also attended.

Najib, an alumnus of St. John's Institution here, said the steps were in recognition of the contributions of mission schools to the development of education in the country and the mission authorities' wish to maintain their tradition and ethos.

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