

Vatican visit alone won't solve Christian problems, says MCA
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Pope Benedict XVI receives a gift by Najib Razak (left) during a meeting at the Pope's summer residence in Castelgandolfo July 18, 2011. — Reuters pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19 — MCA said today that Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Vatican City visit was not enough to solve problems faced by local Christians.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek said that although the prime minister's visit "augurs well for the future," the Najib administration needed to actively engage the Christian community.

"It cannot be denied that Christians do face problems which cannot be solved just by a diplomatic visit but with active engagement from the government.

"Meetings between the Church leaders and government must be held regularly as committed by the Najib administration," he told reporters today.

PM Najib was received yesterday by Pope Benedict XVI at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, in only the second such visit by a Malaysian prime minister since Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 2002.

Although Najib's delegation included Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur Tan Sri Murphy Pakiam, some quarters have criticised the visit as "an election ploy to gain support from Christians."

Malaysia's multi-denominational Christian community is believed to form close to 10 per cent of the 28 million total population, with Roman Catholics making up nearly one million.

But most of the Christians in East Malaysia follow a few other denominations apart from Roman Catholicism, and Najib's visit is seen to only assuage the concerns of the Catholics, and not other Christians.

Putrajaya had limited the import of the Alkitab from Indonesia, with the seizure of 35,100 copies of the Malay-language bibles becoming a key issue ahead of the April 16 Sarawak election this year.

Delays in moving forward the legal tussles over the use of the word "Allah" to also refer to the Christian god has also stirred anger among the community.

Allegations from BN-controlled media, including Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia, that Christians are working hand-in-glove with communist insurgents and opposition politicians to topple the government of the day and supplant it with a Christian prime minister have also stirred a storm of protests.

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