

Bersih demos a blot on image

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HEED THE LAW: Muslims nearly prevented from performing haj by Saudi Arabia as a result, says PM

SERDANG: THE Bersih 3.0 demonstrations in Mecca and Medina last April had tarnished Malaysia's image and nearly prevented many Muslims from performing the haj, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday.

The prime minister said the demonstrations almost led the Saudi Arabian government to impose a restriction on Malaysia's haj pilgrimage quota.

"It was only as a result of our close relationship with the Saudi government that we were able to ensure that no restriction would be imposed," he said at a gathering of imam and mosque committee officials here.

He said while the people were free to voice their opinion, it should be done in the right way and according to the law.

"It may just be a few small demonstrations, but that alone could have affected thousands of Muslims, some of whom had waited up to 15 years to perform the haj.

"Their actions were destructive to their fellow Muslims. It takes a long time to build and unite a country, but all too quickly to tear it down."

Addressing the imam present, Najib said mosques were sacred places of worship and should be protected from attempts to lie, spread hate, gain undue influence or create discord.

"Mosques should be a place for calm prayer and spiritual growth, not used as a platform to plant the seeds of deception."

Najib said Malaysia's transformation programmes reflected the Islamic concept of *Islah*, meaning great change and renewal.

"The government has always held to Islamic principles, of working together with different political and ethnic groups, of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) and *syariah* (adherence to law)."

"It is no surprise that our country continues to move forward and grow more successful by the day," he told the 11,000-strong audience.

Najib vowed to continue providing assistance to imam and religious leaders, and announced plans to expand the haj special programme under the 1Malaysia Development Board.

He said the programme, which financed the pilgrimage for 111 imam and village heads last year, would take 400 pilgrims to Mecca this year.

Later, launching the 1Malaysia for Youth (im4u) Young Leaders Secretariat at Parliament yesterday, the prime minister warned that making changes through revolution would only result in chaos.

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