

**Need For Continuous Dialogue To Improve Inter-religious Relations – Najib
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PETALING JAYA, Dec 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak called on Christian leaders to continue engaging in constructive dialogue to improve inter-religious relations in Malaysia.

He said that no one should fear constructive dialogue because "we can only respect and appreciate one another more, if we know one another better".

"While I accept the nurturing and building relationships are time-intensive, however, we must continue to do so in the best interest of Malaysia which must always be the overriding objective of all communities of Malaysia," he said.

He said this at the Christmas high tea hosted by the Lutheran Church at the Luther Centre here Tuesday.

Najib noted that Christian leaders had been active participants for the past three years in a dialogue mechanism known as the Committee to Promote Harmony and Understanding Among Religious Adherents, headed by Datuk Azman Amin Hassan who is the National Unity and Integration Department director-general.

Najib said that to succeed in this endeavour, the government needed copious amounts of goodwill and understanding.

"We can only realise this aspiration by fostering and nurturing mutual understanding and respect. In view of this, we encourage dialogue and discourse, but we have been cautious to do so in the context of our diversity and the challenges it poses," he said.

Najib said that Malaysia, with its close and historical links with Islamic countries, China and India, coupled with its multi-ethnic population must harness the strategic advantage of constructive dialogue as the nation addressed challenges of globalisation and economic changes.

Furthermore, he said the government had formulated policies to reflect this advantage and would continue to do so in the spirit of 'Malaysia Truly Asia'.

He pointed out that his administration had devised the '1Malaysia - People First, Performance Now' concept, anchored in the country's Constitution, Rukun Negara and a vision to see Malaysia emerge as a developed nation by 2020.

Najib continued that Malaysia was fortunate enough to enjoy steady economic growth that had lifted millions out of the clutches of poverty, stressing that the opportunity to succeed remained within the reach of every Malaysian who was ready to work for it.

He also spoke on the need to continuously assist the less fortunate, saying one of the key thrusts of the 1Malaysia concept was social justice which he described as a key component in ensuring that everyone was given the opportunity and the tools to succeed.

In this connection, Najib urged Malaysia's Christian community to join in the journey of change and renewal for a better Malaysia.

The prime minister said he understood the community might have felt the government had not done enough to engage them.

"But I must, in good conscience, state that we have in fact achieved quite a lot through subtle engagement away from the glare of publicity," he said, adding that the latest decision to lift restrictions on Christians to carry out pilgrimage in Jerusalem was one of the results.

"This is the inclusivity that I'm seeking because I believe there is a place for all of us under the Malaysian sun.

"I'm also here today to once again offer the hand of friendship of the government, to embrace the Christian community and share your goodwill. I don't want to be a prime minister for only a section of the community, but for all Malaysians," he said to the applause of the audience.

Reaffirming his commitment to the Christian community, Najib said they should not feel that they had been forgotten.

"The countless personal interactions I've had with church leaders show that I've not forgotten the Christian community as some had alleged. In fact, every community, be it ethnic or religious, is important to me and my government because we can't exclude anybody," he said.

Among those present were Najib's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Information Communication and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim and his wife Datin Seri Maznah Rais, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Kong Chor Ha.

Others included Christian Federation of Malaysia chairman Bishop Datuk Ng Moon Hing, Bishop of the Lutheran Church Malaysia Philip Lok and Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Archbishop Tan Sri Murphy Pakiam who represented the Catholic bishops.

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