KOTA KINABALU: Malaysia has undergone a special social transformation uniting the peoples in Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia. While the feeling of not being equal still persist, the unplanned social transformation has made it possible to see Sabahans and Sarawakians in Peninsular Malaysia and vice versa.

"We see many from Peninsular Malaysia not only in the universities in Sabah and Sarawak but they are also working and doing business in these two states and vice versa," former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed said.

Mahathir who was invited to speak at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Kiabalu Lecture Series about Sabah in the context of Malaysia's socio-politic yesterday pointed out that the social transformation was special because it was not enjoyed by some countries in the world.

"While we realize that we are from other states, we still feel that we are citizens of Malaysia and our loyalty is to this country. This change of mindset is impressive because it happened without us being pressured or coerced to do so. We accept the fact that we are citizens of a country," he said.

In the past, Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia were separate entities but in politics, the political parties in Sabah, Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia agreed to combine and set up a coalition which was initially known as Perikatan then later changed to Barisan Nasional (BN).

Despite their differences, they politically agreed to work together for the benefit of the country and the states, he said adding that this is unique to Malaysia compared to other foreign countries with racial tensions and unrests.

"A friend told me about his country where someone is shot dead every day just because he or she belongs to a different Islamic sect. In Malaysia, the differences are more pronounced as its citizens are made up of various races which have different religion, language and culture. "Even their economic standing and economic sectors are different. Of course there are dissents but it is not to the extent where we pull out a pistol and kill someone," he stressed.

Mahathir however lamented that there are elements in the country which try to show as if the Government is tyrannical and do not care for the welfare of its citizens.

"I am confident that no one is so pressured to the extent of acting violently against the ruling government and others. However, it is the norm that there will be a small group who are never satisfied. "This is human nature... even though they have been given everything, they will still try to find fault and ask for more," he said, adding, "we are not going through the 'Arab Spring' where the people revolted because they felt that their governments were not giving them opportunities and were tyrannical.

"In Malaysia, can the people say that the Government is a tyrant and does not care for them or is only paying attention to certain areas?" asked Mahathir.

To the people with sound minds, they will agree that the development and wealth of the country are distributed fairly, he pointed out.

Continued in A2. Col 6
Sabah reclaims sea for expansion

“I have seen a lot of new developments in Sabah as well as those that are still in progress. But I do see Sabah reclaiming its sea for expansion and only in a peaceful country can we carry out such development.

“If we live in a country that is constantly plagued by demonstrations and the demonstrators overturn and destroy vehicles, we might not be able to carry out our development. On the other hand, if we do not have enough sand for reclamation, we can make use of the parts of the damaged vehicles,” he said with a laugh.

Sabahans, he said, comprise many ethnic groups and yet they do not battle against each other but instead study, work, play and live together.

This must be preserved, he said, adding, “don’t throw this away just because there are people saying that the political situation in Malaysia is bad and we must have a regime change not through voting but through violence.

“We must be thankful with what we have now and we can see how much Sabah has progressed since it became part of Malaysia in 1963. I am happy because previously it was not easy to drive here and there but now can drive all the way to Sandakan and Tawau as well as other places.

“This is because there is the change in the country’s social and political aspects which has brought us to a more peaceful and progressive Malaysia. I am confident that one day, with the interaction from Sabah to Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia, we will not feel isolated anywhere we are or go to in Malaysia,” he said.