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We have done right to preserve peace

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ON Christmas Eve, after berbuka puasa, I went to Bangsar for the much craved teh tarik. Breaking of the fast feels more complete after a glass of good teh tarik.

There I saw a lot of people, mostly young, on the street ushering in the important day.

Several streets were closed to traffic to enable the revellers to play music, sing and have a good time.

But for sure not all of them were Christians. They came to celebrate yet another Malaysian festival in the Malaysian way.

This is Malaysia. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad put it in his Christmas Day message, Malaysians are fortunate and should be thankful that there is tolerance in the country.

Tolerance, said the Prime Minister, had contributed towards strengthening unity among the people.

Unity, in turn, has foiled attempts by some people to make use of the economic problems to create racial unrest.

Events in Indonesia, where economic recession has degenerated into political, religious and racial upheaval, are a lesson to all Malaysians.

It shows that despite allegations by some desperate people that there is no justice, democracy and freedom of speech in our country, we have, over the last three decades, done the many correct things.

But even the most nationalistic and patriotic of Malaysians will admit that we are not a perfect country. We have our flaws and shortcomings.

Nevertheless, we are certainly better off than most nations of the same age and at the same stage of economic development, bearing in mind that we are at the same time a multi-racial and multi-religious country.

In order to remain a tolerant society, we should not tolerate people who preach racial and religious intolerance and those who side-stepped the law purportedly to demand freedom and justice.

For sure, Christmas celebration by Malaysian Christians and the observation of Ramadan fasting by Muslims would not have been in an atmosphere of peace and security if the illegal demonstrators who took to the streets of Kuala Lumpur several weeks ago were left unchallenged.