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Need to respect each other's beliefs

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's recent revelation that some Muslims in the country as well as in other parts of the world have begun to isolate and insulate themselves from non-Muslims, has quite fittingly brought this unhealthy trend into the open.

It is indeed heartbreaking to watch children, unburdened and free of any hang-ups, suddenly becoming suspicious, distant and critical, much to the chagrin and confusion of some of their childhood and neighbourhood playmates. The air of congeniality and carefree exuberance is suddenly dampened with the toxic intrusion of distrust and prejudice.

Sadder still is the psychological implications and damage that will follow, as negative elements slowly infiltrate and assault the young impressionable minds. They will then grow up accumulating a heavy load of distrust, suspicion, angst, fear and anxiety, that may eventually consume them.

In an environment where similarities, common goals and origins, binding principles and parallel goodness are bypassed in favour of extensive focus on differences and variations, there will be an acute deviation from the wholesome goodness of religion itself.

In multi-religious Malaysia, and the world at large, tolerance alone is not enough. There should flourish within the midst a sincere and deep sense of respect and understanding of the positive elements found in each other's beliefs.