

# 'Propagate religions carefully'

STAR - 5 MAY 2001

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned of the danger of propagating religions to the extent of causing conflicts and violence.

He said conflicts arising from such activities would only bring about an environment where religions could not thrive.

"One of the vital roles of religion in this post-modern age is ensuring harmony in society by not knowingly and blatantly sowing the seed of discord.

"It is true that the nature of some religious denominations that propagation of their faith is obligatory, but we must be careful when undertaking

matters involving religion by giving due consideration to the sensitivity of others of different religious prescriptions," he said.

He was opening the general assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) here last night.

More than 600 delegates representing over 100 countries are attending the week-long assembly, held once every four years. It is hosted by the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) of Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the 21st century would once again give religions a good and constructive role in the life of mankind provided that they did not deviate from

the teachings in their attempts to establish the righteousness of their own faiths.

He said the young generation should be the target of a consistent effort to protect and preserve religious tolerance as they were usually free of biases and prejudices.

The young, he said, had no qualms about studying and playing together and they often walked hand in hand without the slightest feeling of distrust and insecurity.

"They provide the best example of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. However, more often than not, this splendid and cordial relationship will cool off as they grow up.

"The relevant religious au-

thorities should look into ways of halting the loosening of the bonds of friendship of these young children by impressing on them that if they can respect one another, then living together as a community, even while professing different faiths would not be an impossible task," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there had been accusations by those against religion that it was the source of conflicts, persecutions and injustices.

Looking at the historical facts, he said, it would be difficult to just dismiss these charges as unjustified because they were in fact difficult to deny.

However, he said, it was questionable whether these

arose due to the true teachings of the religions or just humans directing their faith towards what was not truly the teachings of a religion.

Intolerance, he said, bred injustice and once started, religious strife had a tendency to become permanent feuds not unlike the feuds which plagued the ignorant pre-Islamic Arab tribes of the Arabian peninsula.

In multi-racial, multi-cultural Malaysia, he said, the greatest contribution that religious leaders could make was to promote tolerance among their followers by giving strong emphasis to noble values like good neighbourliness and the honouring of family ties.