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PM: Religious tolerance vital

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the feeling of restlessness among followers of different faiths must not be allowed to grow and should be resolved at an early stage in a peaceful and fair manner.

The Prime Minister said religious tolerance among the various races was vital in preserving the country's peace and harmony.

The world, he said, had seen how religious intolerance could cause infighting and chaos among followers of different faiths or denominations.

Citing Northern Ireland and certain Asian countries as examples, he said a follower who did not show respect to the beliefs of another could provoke a tense situation.

"There will be disharmony and no peace, which in turn can lead to endless violence and riots," he said at a Wesak Day open house organised by the Malaysian Buddhist Co-ordinating Committee at the Civic Centre here.

Also present were his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, committee chairman Rev Chek Huang and religious leaders.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should be grateful that they could lead harmonious and peaceful lives despite living in a multi-religious society.

Unlike some other countries, he said, there was freedom to practise one's own religion in this country.

"We see places of worship of different religions everywhere in this country. It will be very difficult to quell tense situations once there is distrust and disrespect among one another as a result of religious intolerance."

He said there are times, however, where certain actions can cause followers to be upset or angry. When this happens, there must be a concerted effort by all parties involved to resolve the differences amicably.

"Do not compound the problem by resorting to unjust and inconsiderate measures; find a peaceful and fair way to settle the matter.

"In this way our country will continue to be peaceful and progressive."

Dr Mahathir urged the people to visit each other during festivals or celebrations.