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Thank God for peace, open house

ANOTHER Hari Raya and more open houses. The Prime Minister, his deputy and other government leaders will be welcoming the public to their homes during the first few days of the celebrations. And so too will many other Malays. The joy of the season is shared over the usual fare of ketupat, lemang, rendang and an endless assortment of goodies. That the spirit of festivity is spilling over into the other ethnic communities is much appreciated by Malaysians as we peek into each other's cultures and share in the merriment that is becoming more universal as the nation matures.

This increasing interaction between the races, including the presence of non-Muslims at buka puasa, augurs well for the country. We should build upon this. Malaysia must profit from its uniqueness: its multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity. Although Hari Raya comes but once a year the people have the benefit of open house over and over. There is Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Christmas and the festivals of the Dayak and Kadazan communities and the the tradition can but grow as we learn to relish our diversity and the many pleasures which it lends us.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said this will be his last Hari Raya as Prime Minister. We will miss him, but then it is too early to talk about this.

For Muslims this Hari Raya is one made especially poignant by the sufferings of other Muslims. As Palestinians struggle against Israeli oppression and Iraqis steal every comfort in an ever present danger of an invasion, Malaysians can but pray for them and thank God for the uninterrupted peace and prosperity in this country.

Without a sombre reflection of the very tenuous nature of the bounty that is ours, Malaysian Muslims could be easily seduced into believing that this is just not good enough.

Yes, Muslims are being increasingly persecuted globally but not in Malaysia. It takes only a moment's complacency, however, to spell the reverse. Not only will Muslims here be enduring the same discrimination abroad, they too will lose the peace and sovereignty which we appear to take for granted should the "terrorist haven" label be allowed to stick.