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`Religious tolerance important for peace'

M.K. Megan

SERI KEMBANGAN, Sun. - Religious tolerance among the various communities is important to ensure peace in the country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said people from all religious backgrounds must work together to achieve peace.

He said although Malaysia was an Islamic country, the Government, predominantly Muslim, tolerated people of other religions because this was part of the teachings of Islam.

"What we believe in and how we worship may be different, but it is the right of the people to have their own beliefs and own faiths," he said when addressing about 1,000 people at the Malaysian Buddhist Association's appreciation dinner at the Mines International Exhibition and Convention Centre tonight.

"If we tolerate them they will tolerate us. Therefore, the relationship among the people of different races and religions will be good and not lead to confrontation simply because of racial and religious differences."

Dr Mahathir said if the people had that attitude of tolerance, there would be no disturbance or breaking of peace.

"If we learn to understand other people, then we will not be so antagonistic towards them. That is why in a multi-racial and a multi-religious country, it is important that we learn to understand the races and religions of other people.

"By understanding other races and religions, one should not have a particular distrust of other religions simply because they are different from yours."

Dr Mahathir said people might be different in race and religion, but that did not mean they should be enemies.

"There is no necessity for us to think that just because other people are different, they are wrong or bad.

"I cannot imagine any community being totally wrong."

He said fortunately in Malaysia, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus lived peacefully although there were some extremists who interpreted religion for their own interest.

"This misinterpretation can lead to violence. But, by and large, the majority of the people of different faiths follow the proper teaching of their religions."

Dr Mahathir said the country could only remain peaceful if everyone worked in order to make it peaceful.

"Dedicate yourself to ensure the country remain peaceful, and when the situation is peaceful, everyone can enjoy a good life."

He said in some countries, people deliberately killed others and then lived in fear. They feared that the victims' relatives or friends would try to kill them, and because of that they could not have peace.

Later Dr Mahathir received RM100,000 from the association for the Palestinians.

Present at the function were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, dinner organising committee chairman Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew and Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting.