

Education and dialogue key to peace
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As the world is increasingly becoming a global village and each country a melting pot of diverse cultures, a national identity will inevitably evolve and take precedence over ethnicity.

Advancements in technology will also hasten the process.

While we must not forget our roots and humble beginnings we must let go and look ahead to the future for ourselves and the generations to come. We must be proud to be Malaysians first and race second.

For this to happen there must be high levels of trust, tolerance and inter-religious understanding among the communities. Malaysia recently joined with the other countries to celebrate Inter Faith Harmony Week worldwide.

This is a good first step in the right direction for peace and stability in our land. In view of our multi racial and cultural diversity the task ahead at building this understanding and trust is more difficult, but not impossible.

Concrete action plans are needed at different levels to sustain this peace and understanding throughout the year and for generations to come.

Specific targets like schools, parents, religious heads could be identified and appropriate action plans proposed.

It is apparent from our past experiences that ignorance and lack of understanding within major religions in Malaysia are key factors impeding racial harmony.

Are we doing enough in our schools to address this issue as it is easier to mould young minds? Are we exploiting TV, radio and print, all effective tools of mass communication sufficiently?

A topic like Comparative Religions will definitely help us understand the beliefs and doctrines of key religions in Malaysia and that will make us more knowledgeable and sensitive towards our fellow Malaysians.

In a homogeneous society with only one religion it is fine to have in-depth knowledge of only one religion but in a multi racial and religious context like Malaysia it is imperative that we have knowledge of other religious beliefs as well. Only then will we not cross the line and know our boundaries.

A documentary, 'The Imam and the Pastor' is a good example of how two people, touched by the love of God and forgiveness, were instrumental in bringing religious tolerance and peace to Nigeria.

While remaining true to their individual religious beliefs they are brothers in peace and effectively preach the true teachings of their faiths.

Together they journey to distant villages to spread inter-religious understanding and rebuild trust and peace in problem areas. They believe that peace can be achieved through education and dialogue.

Through our collective efforts, both individually and nationally, we can make inter-faith harmony real in our lives and not merely a one week reflection in February each year.

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