

PM: Religion still a sensitive issue in Malaysia
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Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today admitted that religion continues to be a sensitive issue in this multicultural nation but said he hoped that conflicts could continue to be resolved peacefully.
MCPX

"Malaysia is fortunate as the people of various races and religions in the country can live in peace and harmony all this while," Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"The constitution guarantees the freedom to practise any faith although Islam remains as the official religion," Abdullah said in the statement ahead of the Buddhist Wesak Day celebrations on Monday.

"Realising the fact that religious issues are still a sensitive topic, the government has engaged... with various religious groups in the country to better understand their needs while strengthening ties," he added.

"I really hope through this, we can resolve conflicts or problems peacefully and amicably," he added.

Increasing polarisation

About 60 percent of Malaysia's 27 million people are ethnic Malay Muslims. The country's minority Chinese and Indians are mostly Buddhists, Hindus or Christians.

Malaysia suffered bloody race riots in May 1969 between Malays and the Chinese community, in which hundreds were killed. Since then the country has been largely peaceful.

But recently there have been growing fears over "Islamisation" of the country and the increasing polarisation of the three main ethnic communities.

Many among Malaysia's ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities believe the government's economic policy discriminates against them in favour of the Muslim-Malay majority.