

Inter-faith dialogues a good thing, says British DPM

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PUTRAJAYA: Britain is keen to learn the Malaysian experience in maintaining harmony among its multi-ethnic people.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was told by his British counterpart, John Prescott, that inter-faith dialogues seemed to serve well the promotion of racial tolerance among Malaysians.

Prescott, Najib said, was also taken up by the freedom of non-Muslims to practice their faith in a country where the official religion is Islam.

He told Najib that this aspect was relevant to what was going on in the United Kingdom.

At a joint Press conference, Prescott was quick to dismiss a foreign reporter's suggestion that the use of the Internal Security Act was the reason for Malaysia's harmony.

He said Malaysia was not dependent on the ISA, but owed the strong bond among the people to the "very good community relations that exist".

"That is one of the lessons to be learnt in our country."

Najib, echoing Prescott's sentiments, said, "We cannot see it from just one dimension. It's not just instruments like the ISA, but the overall administrative structure and instruments which shaped the coun-

try's policies since day one that have contributed to peace and harmony," he said.

On inter-faith dialogues, Prescott said they promoted respect between communities and allowed discussions to understand and respect each others' positions, while attempting to understand each others' arguments.

He said in conflicts between Christianity and Islam, for instance, it was important that

more understanding was achieved and that there were more exchanges of views.

"All communities have concerns, and we need to communicate," he said. "It is important that we show respect to each other, deal with problems (because) at the end of the day if you ignore them and take no notice, they will lead to difficulties."

Prescott arrived on Friday for a four-day visit.