

# SM Goh stresses value of racial and religious tolerance

THE many trips Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong made to the Middle East in recent years have left him with one deep impression.

It is the "subtle and not-so-subtle differences" in the way Islam is practised in the Muslim countries there.

For instance, women in conservative Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive. It is quite the opposite in Qatar.

Yet the people in both coun-

tries are followers of Wahabism, an austere form of Islam born in the 18th century.

Mr Goh cited the two cases at an event yesterday to stress the importance of adapting religious practices to suit the context of a society.

Bringing the point home, he praised Muslim leaders here for practising Islam within Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious context.

At the same time, it has to

take into account that as a very small country, Singapore can survive only if it is integrated into the modern world, Mr Goh told religious and community leaders at his Marine Parade GRC event.

It was to mark Prophet Muhammad's birthday and Racial Harmony Day.

Similar events to emphasise racial and religious tolerance were also held at other constituencies as the month-long cele-

bration culminates in Racial Harmony Day today.

At Serangoon North in Ang Mo Kio GRC, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged Singaporeans to not let external events disrupt racial harmony here.

He called on Singaporeans to make a special effort to ensure events, such as the controversial Danish cartoons and the Dutch film *Fitna*, do not disrupt inter-racial harmony here.

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