



DON'T TAKE RELIGIOUS HARMONY FOR GRANTED

says Prime Minister
Lee Hsien Loong

PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

LEE HUI CHIEH

WITH Singaporeans becoming more religious, it is even more crucial that they remain sensitive to other religions and that society stays secular, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

Speaking at the National Day Rally on the 50th year of the nation's self-government, Mr Lee noted that Singapore was following "a global trend of rising religiosity".

Religion can be a positive force, providing people with spiritual strength and guidance, he said, "but stronger religious fervour can have side effects which have to be managed carefully, especially in a multiracial and multi-religious society".

He urged Singaporeans to follow four basic rules to keep racial and religious harmony here.

First, they should be tolerant of the practices of other religions. For example, Muslims do not drink alcohol, but it is not banned.

Mr Lee said: "All must adopt

'live and let live' as our guiding principle."

Second, they have to separate religion from politics, because if one religious group mobilises its followers, others will do the same, and political conflict may escalate into a clash of religions.

Third, the Government has to stay secular, to ensure that all religions can be practised freely without infringing on other groups, Mr Lee said.

Finally, Singaporeans should preserve the common space that they share. For example, schools should not make it compulsory

for students to pray or attend Bible classes, he added.

Trainee teacher Bobby Goh, 27, said that it was pragmatic to keep religious harmony here.

"If there is no internal stability and religions are in conflict, then it will be problematic for us to serve as a business centre."

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— ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY JOY FANG

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