

Saudis did what they had to do, says PM

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised Muslims in the country and elsewhere not to criticise Saudi Arabia for seeking military help from the United States in facing the threat from Iraq.

The Prime Minister said Muslims outside Saudi Arabia should place themselves in the Saudis' predicament before passing judgment. Could the critics offer the same kind of assistance to the Saudis as what the US is doing, Dr Mahathir asked.

"It is easy to criticise Saudi Arabia for seeking help from a non-Islamic nation but if we were in the same predicament as the Saudis, wouldn't we have taken similar steps and requested help from a nation which could provide the necessary support," he said in his speech at the State stadium during a ceremony held in his honour for being conferred the "Liberator of the Third World" title.

Some Muslims seek to back their criticisms by saying that Saudi Arabia was wrong in seeking help from the US, an ally of the Israelis, who are the traditional enemies of the Arabs.

"No Islamic nation in the world wants its independence to be wrested away, whether by another Isla-

mic country or not," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said this showed there was a need for friends in the international scene, be they developed or developing nations.

"If Kuwait had no friends, who could they turn to when Iraq invaded their country.

"With this in mind, Malaysia's foreign policy ensures that the country works together with other Third World nations," he said.

He said the need to work closely with such nations stemmed from the realisation of "helping those in need when we are prosperous and stable as we may one day need to turn to them when we suffer."

"We have nothing to lose in helping these nations with our expertise or financial assistance. In return, we create good trade ties and gain other benefits," he said.

Earlier, the Prime Minister was escorted by some 200 State Umno Youth members on motor-cycles from the State Secretariat (where a closed-door meeting with Barisan Nasional leaders was held) to the stadium.

Despite a shower, some 500 flag-waving schoolchildren remained along the road to cheer Dr Mahathir.

On his arrival at the

stadium, he was given a rousing welcome by members of the Barisan Nasional from Terengganu and other States who had gathered to honour him.

He was then presented with a long kris, a sash with the words "Liberator of the Third World" inscribed on it and a copy of the Quran as tokens to mark the occasion.

This was followed by a speech by MIC president

Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu who pledged his support to the Prime Minister.

Datuk Seri Samy Vellu praised Dr Mahathir for his leadership and policies which had helped the country to progress and overcome the economic slowdown while ensuring political stability.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, who next addressed the gathering, said he was

proud to serve under Dr Mahathir, who has led the BN Government and promoted national unity and strengthened political stability.

"It's sad that while Dr Mahathir is acclaimed internationally as a liberator and champion of the Third World, opposition leaders continue to make wild allegations to put the Prime Minister in the worst light possible," he said.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik also spoke at the gathering.

He said: "I have never met a Cabinet member who works as hard as Dr Mahathir. When the country was suffering from an economic slowdown a few years ago, the Prime Minister chaired a special committee to deliberate on the problem and how to overcome it."