

06 DEC 1996

Mahathir-Saudi

MINOR DIFFERENCES SHOULD NOT HINDER COOPERATION- DR MAHATHIR

RIYADH, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and Saudi Arabia need to persue fostering Islamic solidarity through tangible and practical engagements between and among Islamic countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

He said that minor differences between the two countries in the understanding and practice of Islam should not prevent them from cooperating with each other.

Malaysia is open to any suggestion to develop new form of partnership with Saudi Arabia, be it in terms of bilateral relations or multilateral cooperation, he said at a state banquet hosted in his honour by Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul Aziz Al-Saud in conjunction with Dr Mahathir's four-day official visit to this oil-rich kingdom.

Dr Mahathir said there were many fields that both countries could benefit from through collaborative effort.

"I emphasise this because the single most important challenge facing all developing countries, whether they are Muslim or not, is the pressing need to enhance the socio-economic wellbeing of their peoples," he said.

"This is especially important because we are increasingly faced with an international order that is manifestly biased against countries of the south, in particular Muslim countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir said both countries must continue to work together bilaterally and within the context of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to ensure the suscess of their goals.

"By so doing we will be better able to assist other Muslim countries in economic reconstruction," he said.

Dr Mahathir described the relationship between Malaysia and Saudi Arabia as close and meningful that pre-dates the independence of Malaysia in 1957.

He said the formation of the OIC in 1971 headquartered in Jeddah with the then Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-haj, as its first Secretary-General was a result of a such purposeful cooperation between two friendly countries.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to have an audience with King Fahd Abdul Aziz Al-Saud on Saturday evening.

The Prime Miniter is also scheduled to attend a luncheon meeting with members of the council of the Saudi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

On Saturday, Dr Mahathir who is accompanied by the economic adviser to the government Tun Daim Zainuddin and five ministers will meet several senior officials in the Saudi Royal Capital. -- BERNAMA

ZS YBK AAM