

16/01/1997

Dr M named recipient of King Faisal Prize

LOS ANGELES, Wed: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been named the 1997 recipient of Saudi Arabia's King Faisal International Prize for his services to Islam.

Dr Mahathir, who is here to promote Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor, told newsmen he will most probably go to Riyadh in March to accept the award.

He received the news via telephone in Beverly Hills and was later faxed a message from the award foundation.

The fax noted that the Prime Minister is a widely respected statesman whose policies have fostered close rapport among Muslims and non-Muslims, enabling him to lead the nation to economic success.

Also mentioned was his leading role in the setting-up of several Islamic institutions such as the International Islamic University and an Islamic bank.

Commenting on the award later, he told newsmen of his surprise in being named as this year's recipient, saying that there are others who deserve it.

He said there is a growing realisation of Malaysia's success in developing itself while being administered through an Islamic government.

"The country has become an example for those whose population are of various faiths," he said.

The success has made Malaysia believe more that it is following the proper Islamic way of governance, he said, adding that the award is also a recognition that what the Umno-led Government is doing is in accordance with the religion.

At the least, it shows that a nation where the holy Islamic city of Mecca is located recognises Malaysia's success while keeping to the Islamic teachings, he added.

He said Malaysia must continue to progress, to show the world that Islam is appropriate even in current situations and can even lead a nation to success.

On the use of multimedia to counter negative views on the religion, he said while Malaysians have taken the initiatives to answer criticisms of the religion in the Internet, it is not being done in an organised manner.

Malaysia must have an organised structure, specially to correct whatever misinterpretations and misconceptions others may have of the religion, he added.

The award consists of a certificate, a medal and US\$200,000 (US\$1 = RM2.45). Since its inception in 1979, there has been 118 recipients from 32 countries. It is awarded for various categories, namely services in Islam, Islamic studies, medicine and science.

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