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King Faisal award a recognition of Dr Mahathir's service to Islam

Syed Nadzri in Riyadh

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the father of so many milestone development projects in Malaysia, will gain a major international acclaim tonight when he receives the King Faisal International Prize.

The award, Saudi Arabia's version of the Nobel Peace Prize, is in recognition of his service to Islam and will be presented at the Al-Khozama Centre in downtown Riyadh.

Not just another feather in the cap, the prize could possibly be the jewel in the crown for the Prime Minister, who had already been presented with top commemorative awards from several countries, including Bosnia's highest.

Dr Mahathir will thus join an exclusive list of eminent leaders and top scientists to be given the award.

The award foundation in Riyadh quoted Dr Mahathir as a widely respected statesman whose policies have fostered rapport and co-operation between Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia.

He was also commended for playing an important role in establishing the International Islamic University, Pusat Islam, Bank Islam and YAPEIM, the Islamic Economic Development Foundation of Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir will get a certificate containing a citation on him, a commemorative 22-carat 200gm gold medallion and 750,000 Riyals (RM500,000).

The Prime Minister joins previous winners such as Saudi's King Khalid ibn Abdul Aziz and King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz, South Africa's Ahmad H. Deedat and Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic in the history books as outstanding individuals in the Islamic world.

Since its inception in 1979, the King Faisal International Prize has earned worldwide recognition. This year's prize announcement brings the total number of laureates to 118 from 32 countries.

The prize which also has categories in Islamic studies, Arabic Literature, Medicine and Science is not limited to Muslim nominees and several non-Muslim Americans and Europeans have won the award. One, Dr Roger Garaudy, even won the Service to Islam category in 1986 jointly with Ahmad Deedat.

This year's medicine award was won jointly by an Australian, Professor Colin Masters; a German, Professor Konrad Beyreuther, and a Canadian, Professor James Gusella.

Masters from the University of Melbourne and Beyreuther from the University of Heidelberg won for their collaboration in making major advances in understanding Alzheimer's disease, while Gusella of Harvard Medical School was commended for his efforts in seeking cures for Huntington's disease.

The science category prize was awarded to University of Colorado's Professor Carl Wieman and American National Institute for Standards and Technology's Professor Eric Cornell for a breakthrough research in physics.

The Americans developed a technique to achieve a Bose-Einstein condensate by combining laser and evaporative cooling of matter in new atomic traps to a record temperature of 170 nano-Kelvins (about -273 degrees Celsius).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad receives King Faisal

International Award

* The King Faisal award was created in memory of the third king of Saudi Arabia, King Faisal who was assassinated by one of his nephews in 1975. The award is given by the King Faisal Foundation, which was established in 1976 to honour scientists and Islamic scholars.

* The award carries a certificate, gold medallion and US\$200,000

* The 1997 winner are:

* Services to Islam - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad

* Science (Physics) - Carl E. Wieman & Eric A. Cornell

* Medicine (Degenerative diseases of the nervous system) - James Francis Gusella Collin Louis Master Konard Traugutt Beyreuther

* Islamic Studies (Status of Women in Islam) - Abdul Aziz Zeedan Bahaj Alan

* Arab Literature - Not awarded this year due to insufficient work meeting the standard requirement.

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