

15 JAN 1997

Award-PM

MAHATHIR RECEIVES SAUDI AWARD FOR SERVICES TO ISLAM

By: Salmy Hashim

LOS ANGELES, Jan 15 (Bernama) -- Saudi Arabia has awarded Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the 1997 King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam in recognition of his outstanding accomplishments in the promotion of Islamic values during his leadership over the past 16 years.

The Prime Minister, who is in California to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) to American investors, said he was informed of the award by Prince Bandar bin Saud bin Khaled Al-Saud, the Secretary-General of the King Faisal Foundation, by telephone on Tuesday.

"I was surprised...because there are many others more qualified, but I accept it with all my heart because it is in recognition of Malaysia's achievements in Islamic activities," he told Malaysian journalists.

There are four categories of recipients -- Service for Islam, Islamic Studies, Science and Arabic Literature -- and so far 118 people from 32 countries have been awarded.

Each award carries with it a certificate, a commemorative 200gm gold medallion and a cash award of SR750,000 (US\$200,000 - RM500,000).

The award was created in 1976 in memory of King Faisal ibn Abdel Aziz after he was assassinated by one of his nephews.

Prince Bandar, in a statement from Jeddah, said Dr Mahathir is a widely respected Muslim statesman whose wisdom and moderation during his premiership have reflected the magnanimity and forbearance of Islam.

"His policies have fostered rapport and cooperation between Malaysian Muslims and non-Muslims, thereby enabling him to lead his country toward modernisation and economic prosperity," said the statement.

The foundation also noted Dr Mahathir's important role in establishing several Islamic, cultural and economic institutions in Malaysia which include the International Islamic University, the Islamic Centre, the Islamic Bank and the Islamic Economic Development Foundation of Malaysia.

Prince Bandar also praised Dr Mahathir's key role in solving disputes in Muslim countries and in supporting the rights of Muslim minorities, especially in Southeast Asia, through various Islamic organisations.

Dr Mahathir said the award showed the Saudi government recognised the struggle of Umno to raise the status of Muslims.

He said the award would refute accusations that Umno had deviated from the teachings of Islam.

Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian government would use the Internet to strengthen Islamic values and correct confused perceptions of the religion.

The multimedia could and should be used to give a true picture of Islam and to counter deviant teachings channelled through the Internet, he said.

-- BERNAMA

SH CTL