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A fruitful busy week for Dr M in the US

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad left New York on Tuesday with his work well accomplished. It seems his visit, first to Chicago and then in New York throughout much of last week was more than just to be at the Islamic Society of North America (Isna) annual convention.

In fact, the Isna episode was quickly buried as he got down to business just a few hours after touching down in Chicago. For many in his party, it was to be yet another hectic schedule.

In the end, Dr Mahathir spent very little time at the hotel where he stayed in Chicago. Even when he did, there were streams of visitors who came a-calling with various propositions, making the hotel lobby a hive of activity for the Malaysian delegation.

Indeed, Dr Mahathir's itinerary in Chicago had much to do with Malaysia's future.

His visit to the headquarters of the electronics giant, Motorola, was followed by an endorsement by the company of the Malaysian Government's policies and a promise by it to continue investing in Malaysia.

He also met with officials of the US-Asean Business Council who agreed to play their part in promoting Malaysia in the international market by telling the true picture of the country's political and economic environment, to help attract more investments and tourists to the country.

Then there were the series of meetings he had with Muslim businessmen who were involved in high-technology enterprises. Essentially, discussions in these meetings were not only commercially-centred but also involved the larger picture of improving the status of Islam around the world.

Malaysia has been recognised as the most active government in the Muslim world in promoting Islamic financial instruments and markets and should the discussion in the meetings he had with the Muslim entrepreneurs in Chicago materialise, it may produce the first Islamic venture capital operations in America's Silicon Valley.

The fact remains that Malaysia is a country wellknown among the Muslim world.

In New York itself, Malaysia's achievements in promoting Islamic banking, for example, have many times appeared in writings in many of the Islamic free newspapers published in the city.

And there have been enquiries from Muslim journalists based in New York, wanting to explore the possibility of setting up an Islamic world news agency, based within Kuala Lumpur's Multimedia Super Corridor, specifically to counter the negative image others have painted of Islam.

The American Finance House-Lariba was one, unwavering in its positive views towards Malaysia and the Prime Minister.

It went on to present the award and paid glowing tribute to the Malaysian leader. This was despite pressure from outside to prevent it from doing so.

As it turned out, no one was interested in putting Malaysia's politics under the microscope during the award ceremony. The Prime Minister's advice was still sought, including by a citizen of another Muslim nation on how to promote stability in the latter's country.

As it turned out, Lariba was more interested in Malaysia's achievements in the Islamic finance sector and the role Dr Mahathir's Government has played in them.

Its founder spoke how he agreed with Malaysia's move to tackle the

aftermath of the regional economic crisis in 1997 using its own methods instead of relying on help from multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

The Prime Minister also had an important message for the Malaysian students he met in Chicago. "Don't destroy something you would yourselves inherit one day," he told them.

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