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Lariba award for Dr Mahathir

Mustapha Kamil in New York

THE sole American Islamic financial organisation will present its life-time achievement award to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in recognition of his exemplary leadership next month.

American Finance House - Lariba - is to present the award to Dr Mahathir when he attends the Islamic Cultural Centre of Greater Chicago in Northbrook on Sept 1.

The founder of the US government-recognised and successful Islamic financial house, Dr Yahia Abdul-Rahman, said the award recognised Dr Mahathir's "leading role model in charting new courses in economic development, monetary policy, and multi-cultural and multi-ethnic co-existence and also putting in practice the pioneering spirit of doing the unusual during the 1998 Asian economic and monetary meltdown".

Dr Mahathir led Malaysia's industrialisation drive and went against traditional economic prescriptions, opting for selective capital controls instead of an International Monetary Fund programme in defending the Malaysian economy during the 1997/1998 Asian economic crisis.

Malaysia is the only Southeast Asian economy which has not turned to the IMF for bailout, thus keeping its domestic economic policies intact.

Meanwhile, the facility where Dr Mahathir is scheduled to receive the award is one of the oldest organisations in the United States, built by Bosnian-American Muslims who immigrated to America after the first world war.

American Finance House is an independent finance company offering financing in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence to Muslims and non-Muslims in America. It was formed by a group of highly accomplished Muslim businessmen and is the only such establishment in the United States.

It was incorporated in California as a finance company in 1987. Apart from the meaning "No Riba", or without element of conventional interest in its financial products, the word "Lariba" is also an acronym for "Los Angeles Reliable Investment Bankers Associates".

The company is licensed to conduct business in the states of Arizona, California, Georgia, Michigan, Kentucky and New Jersey. It is getting approvals to operate in Minnesota, Colorado, Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas and Washington State.

Its main goal is to provide Islamic financing to all people regardless of their national origin, religious beliefs, gender or colour.

Largely through its Internet-based operations Lariba.Com, the company provides responsible asset-based financing for automobiles, equipment and real estate as well as business and trade financing. This includes financing medical and dental facilities, home financing, construction financing and small and medium size franchise business financing for Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, Baskin Robbins Ice Cream stores, restaurants, gas and service stations and car wash facilities.

It has an ambitious long-term plan to develop a network of banks in America that offers Islamic banking windows.

The company is advised, among others, by Prof Dr Nejatullah Siddiqui of Aligarh University and King Abdul-Aziz University and Prof Dr Mahmoud El-Gamal, the first chair professor of Islamic Finance in the United States at Rice University, Houston, Texas.

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