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Mahathir-World

DR MAHATHIR TO BRIDGE GAP BETWEEN THE WEST AND MUSLIM WORLD

From Zulkefli Salleh

JEDDAH, Oct 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is prepared to continue to play a role to create understanding and ease tension between the Muslim world and the West after his retirement in October next year.

"I am prepared to play the role but not as Prime Minister," he told Malaysian journalists, here today.

When asked in what capacity he was prepared to play the role, he said the matter could possibly be thought of later but again stressed it would not be in the capacity of Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir was asked to elaborate his reply to a question by a Saudi at a press conference, held earlier, whether he would continue to speak for the Muslim world because his leadership was still needed, especially when the Sept 11 attacks on the United States had polarised the world into the West and the Muslim World and caused tension between the two sides.

Responding to the question at the conference packed with Arab journalists and a number of foreign correspondents, Dr Mahathir did not say whether he was willing to continue to play that role but said: "I don't think I can do all these things alone."

Dr Mahathir, who will chair the meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference in October next year, stressed there was a need for both sides, the United States and the Muslim world, to sit down and think why people were resorting to terrorist acts.

Noting that responses from both sides so far over the issue had not been quite rational, Dr Mahathir reiterated that terrorism could not be eliminated by attacking a country and erecting barriers and taking security measures.

"Both sides are angry. The Americans are angry because for the first time their country has been attacked. The Muslims are angry because they have been accused of terrorism, as if everyone of them is guilty," he said.

The Prime Minister, who ended his two-day visit to Saudi Arabia today, said that he had during his bilateral talks with Saudi leaders discussed the issue on Iraq and problems faced by the Muslim world and how they should take a common stand on these issues.

Dr Mahathir had an audience with King Fahd yesterday and held bilateral talks with his Saudi counterpart Crown Prince Abdullah Abdul Aziz and paid a courtesy call on Deputy Prime Minister Prince Sultan in Riyadh.

Dr Mahathir said he also discussed bilateral issues particularly on economic cooperation.

Earlier in the day, Dr Mahathir had a dialogue session with Saudi businessmen organised by the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI).

The dialogue received overwhelming response where Dr Mahathir shared Malaysia's experience in developing her economy and answered no less than 10 questions from the floor. It was a preparatory session for the Jeddah Economic Forum to be held in January.

Dr Mahathir also delivered a keynote address at a seminar on Vision and Challenges of the Saudi Arabian Economy organised by the Saudi Arabian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Riyadh yesterday.

He was also feted to a dinner by Prince Sultan last night at his new palace designed after an old palace he grew up in, and presented the Prime Minister with an Arabian horse.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to return home tomorrow morning after concluding a three-nation visit, beginning Oct 16, which took him to India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

-- BERNAMA

ZS AFY AO