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Dr M prepared to promote ties between Muslim world and West

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is prepared to devote time to help bring understanding 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 said.

The matter could possibly be thought about later, he told Malaysian journalists yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was elaborating on his reply during a Press conference after a dialogue with members of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to a question whether he would continue to speak for the Muslim world.

Dr Mahathir said all Muslim nations should co-operate to overcome the challenges affecting them.

"I don't think I can do all these things alone."

The Prime Minister said what was needed now was for both sides, the Muslim world and the West, to think rationally.

"The Americans are angry because, for the first time, their country had been attacked (Sept 11, 2001).

"And the Muslims are also angry because they have been accused (of being terrorists), as if everyone of us is guilty.

"What we are trying to do is to tell the Americans that the way to deal with terrorism is not by erecting barriers or by taking security measures... with terrorists, you don't know who or where they are."

He added that the way to fight terrorism was to be rational. "Let's sit down and think about why people are behaving like this."

On another issue, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would not use water as a weapon in its ongoing negotiations over disputes with Singapore.

He said Singapore was guaranteed water supply if both sides agreed on the right price.

"The republic was not coming up with the right price, which was the stumbling-block in settling the issue."

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question on whether Malaysia would use water as a weapon against Singapore given his call for Muslim countries to use oil as a weapon against the West.

The Prime Minister said there was a big disparity on how much Singapore paid Malaysia for water and the profit the republic made from it.

He said Malaysia sold water at three sen per 1,000 gallons, and this was fixed in 1927 under British rule.

"Is there anything that was sold at three sen in 1927 which is sold at three sen today?"

"The answer is this water. That's why we ask Singapore, please we want to renegotiate."

Dr Mahathir, however, said Malaysia would not cut off supply to Singapore, adding that people in the republic would have sufficient water to drink and bath.

On rumours that money was floated from the West, particularly from the United States, to other countries including Malaysia after the Sept 11 attacks, Dr Mahathir said, in jest: "How I wished it were true. But we have not seen the money yet."

Earlier in Riyadh last night, Dr Mahathir met with the Malaysian community at a dinner at the residence of the Malaysian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad.