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Seeing Malaysia as a tolerant country

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PANGKOR, Fri. - International delegates to the inaugural Pangkor Retreat have been invited by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to see for themselves how Malaysia stands as an example of a moderate, tolerant and enlightened Muslim country.

The Prime Minister, in his message to the delegates, said Malaysia was dedicated to the concept of peaceful co-existence.

He said it believed in constructive engagement as the answer to the world's ills, rather than conflict, but it needed the vision, good judgment, creativity and innovation which this retreat would be able to facilitate.

"At the present time, the spotlight is on Islamic countries and the focus on security," he said.

The forum, entitled the Asian Global Leadership Forum, is organised by Forbes Inc, YTL Corporation Berhad, CNBC and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute, and is held in the idyllic Pangkor Laut Resort on a private island off Lumut, Perak.

The forum's theme is An Initiative for Peace in Paradise, and aims to look at the changes in the world since Sept 11 and further measures to promote peace.

It covers a wide range of issues, from political and security considerations, to the economy, and of course, terrorism.

Women and youth, businessmen, politicians and ambassadors are among the speakers.

Dr Mahathir described the retreat as taking a very original approach.

"As the millennium generation, we have to be concerned about how we can shape the future to make the world a better and a safer place.

"This is the declared objective of the Retreat. It is no exaggeration to say that what is at stake is nothing less than the destiny of mankind," he said.

The forum, which runs through the weekend, is being attended by eminent persons in Malaysia and abroad.

It will be opened by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak tomorrow while Dr Mahathir will deliver a keynote address on Sunday.

World renowned tenor Luciano Pavarotti will perform a special concert at Emerald Bay tomorrow as a celebration of peace, his second concert in Malaysia.

In his welcome address, YTL managing director Tan Sri Francis Yeoh said the forum is predicated on faith - faith in the essential goodness of man and above all, faith in God.

"The essence of this faith is that despite Sept 11, God is still in charge and that good will triumph over evil," he said.

Co-chair Steve Forbes, president and chief executive of Forbes Inc and also editor-in-chief of Forbes magazine, hoped the conference would address steps for moving ahead with the global economy.

He said he believed that the United States would deal with Iraq by the end of this year.

"...and with that out of the way, what do we do in the post-Iraq world?"

Focusing on the global economy and its link to democracy, he said this was an invaluable opportunity to put together a new institution for peace, comparing it with the time after World War II.

Co-chair Mirzan Mahathir, president of Asli, said it was not necessary

to look at the peace process from purely the political and societal standpoint. The private sector should also consider their contribution. "It is important to return to a safe and secure environment," he said.