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Mahathir-Wit

MAHATHIR ENLIVENS CLOSING OIC PRESS CONFERENCE WITH USUAL WIT

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's wit had journalists and guests in stitches to punctuate an otherwise serious media conference on the final day of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit here today.

In the midst of having to clarify himself over his allegedly controversial opening speech yesterday, the prime minister enlivened the affair with witty responses to some of the questions, to the amusement of those present.

A question from the Associated Press, one of the news organisations which heavily reported on Dr Mahathir's alleged anti-semitic tendencies, caught everyone by surprise.

Instead of asking the prime minister weighty questions, the news agency chose to ask him how he felt about Taiwan snatching away Malaysia's distinction of having the world's tallest building.

"They have one very tall building, taller than ours. But we have two (the Petronas Twin Towers)," he said to applause.

"We have the distinction of being (home to the) the tallest twin towers in the world. No one has tried that yet," he said, drawing more applause from the floor.

Alluding to reports that United States President George W. Bush had "promoted" Australia as Washington's "sheriff" in this part of the world, Dr Mahathir said:

"Of course Australia has now been designated the sheriff, not the deputy sheriff, he (Australian Prime Minister John Howard) is now the sheriff.

"I can assure Australia that if he acts as a sheriff in this country, he will be treated as a terrorist and dealt with as a terrorist.

"My foreign minister I think backs me on this," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also queried whether he would continue to make headlines with hard-hitting speeches after his retirement at the end of this month.

"I've said before that I will be even more irresponsible after I step down from being the prime minister.

"But of course, not being the prime minister, probably people won't take notice of what I say. So I'll be more free to say nasty things, thank you," he said, again drawing laughter from the audience.

-- BERNAMA

MAM RYN JK