

06/06/2003

Abdullah conferred Chile's highest award

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - New Straits Times group editor-in-chief Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad was conferred Chile's highest award, the Gran Cruz de la Orden al Merito de Chile, tonight.

The conferment of the award by Chilean ambassador to Malaysia, Roberto Ibarra, was witnessed by the Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, Raja Muda of Perak Raja Dr Nazrin Shah, Deputy Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen and diplomats who were among the 160 guests.

Other previous recipients were Negri Sembilan Yang di-Pertuan Besar Tuanku Ja'afar Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and former Dewan Negara president Tan Sri Michael Chen.

Abdullah, in his acceptance speech, said he received the award, established 186 years ago, with gratitude and humility.

"In what little I have attempted to do or speak for the Afro-Asian and Latin American brethren and nations, obviously some people out there must have found something worthy. As for the rest of it, I do hope others will find ways to improve the performance in the future," he said.

Abdullah said people of all religions, faiths, races and nations should enjoy the things they cherished like freedom, peace, prosperity, stability, respect, equality and fraternity.

It was his prayer, he said, that the binding forces of mutual respect, independence, non-interference and love would bring peace to people worldwide.

Describing the world as different today, Abdullah said this was so compared to his youth.

"There is little we cannot do together, in a host of new co-operative ventures. Divided, as we are now, there is little we can do," he said, lamenting that the UN had been marginalised in the international equation.

Alluding to a hyperpower, he said a nation had become part, even the cause, of everyone's problem, and part of the solution.

"A nation or State reveals itself not only by the men and women it produces, but also by the people it honours, by those it remembers."

In a brief speech laced with humour, he described Ibarra as a "a wonderful man, a pukka diplomat, a good friend, a deft advocate of multilateralism".

"You are a popular ambassador because you are not sent out to confuse, much less annoy your host. On the contrary, you are so good, you can handle a porcupine without disturbing the quills; you are so artful, you never try to stand between a dog and a lamp-post."

Ibarra, he said, was an incomparable envoy who had the rare ability of doing what he needed to do with consummate tact and skill.

Earlier, Ibarra, in his speech, said the award was Chile's recognition of Abdullah's contribution to the process of raising international awareness of Malaysia.

In doing so, he said, the former Malaysian special envoy to the United Nations had bought the people of Chile and Malaysia closer.

"You are an international man who continues to promote Malaysia. Such a task takes a lot of convincing to do and, whenever it was necessary, the politician in you made it happen."

On his role within the media, he said Abdullah was a journalist at heart with an informed opinion to support Dr Mahathir's vision of the world.

"Whether he uses his intellectual depth to convince as a politician, talk as a diplomat or make a point as a journalist, his use of words is a trademark in which a sense of humour is never absent."

Orden al Merito de Chile, established on June 1, 1817, by Chilean independence hero, General Bernardo O' Higgins, symbolises Chile's appreciation and recognition of foreign dignitaries whose actions and friendship have been of service to the nation.