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`We can help clear misconceptions on Islam'

KANGAR, Tues. - Malaysia can play an international role in helping the West and other countries overcome misconceptions or misinterpretations about the Islamic world, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

"Malaysia, which is held in high esteem in the international scene, can help bridge that gap (misinterpretations) and take the lead in forging better international understanding," said Najib.

He said the country had held the Non-Aligned Movement conference and would soon host the Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting in October.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had described meeting US President George W. Bush as "warm" while International Monetary Fund managing director Horst Kohler hailed Malaysia's banking reforms as worthy of emulation, said Najib.

"These have made Malaysia a unique role model of variety prevailing in unity among the diverse races - and so can help the West and others in making them understand Islam for what it is," he told reporters after opening a one-day State Umno Convention themed "Thinkings of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad" at Dewan Warisan here today.

Present were Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Rural Development Minister and Padang Besar Umno division chief Datuk Azmi Khalid and Kangar Umno division chief Datuk Radzi Sheikh Ahmad.

Earlier, Najib praised Dr Mahathir for his "maturity of political thought" and his analytical, strategic and futuristic thinking.

Many were sceptical of Putrajaya when it was first mooted. Now it was the pride of the nation, and in 10 to 20 years many would ask why it was not planned on a much bigger scale, he said.

Najib called on party members to prepare the election machinery and to refrain from "internal differences" to ensure a smooth transition when Dr Mahathir retired in October.

Party members should work to ensure the Barisan Nasional's victory in the next general election was bigger than the last one.

"Stop that so-seh, soh-seh (bickering and speculation) in coffeeshops and coffee houses," added Najib.