

# This country that we love belongs 11 to all of us...

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KUALA LUMPUR: Chinese in Malaysia are better off than Malays.

And they are successful because there are opportunities for them to do well in the country, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

As such, it was baseless for Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew to say that Chinese here were marginalised.

Abdullah was asked to comment on Lee's statement during an interview on CNN's *Talk Asia* segment yesterday.

He was interviewed on a range of issues, including the testy relationship with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the perception of Islam post-9/11.

Last month, Lee told an international forum that the attitude of Malaysia and Indonesia towards Singapore Was shaped by the way they

treated their own ethnic Chinese minorities.

"Our neighbour both have problems with their Chinese. They are successful. They are hard-working and, therefore, they are systematically marginalised."

Lee statement angered Malaysians, prompting Abdullah to write to him seeking an explanation.

The former prime minister of Singapore replied, saying that he was sorry that his statement had caused Abdullah great discomfort. But he did not withdraw his comments about the Chinese in Malaysia.

The PM said that Lee had no reason to raise the issue.

"The Chinese here are better off than the indigenous people, the Malays," he said.

When the interviewer pointed Out that Lee had suggested the Chinese were marginalised because they were successful, Abdullah replied: "No, they are successful because we give them opportunities,

• TURN TO PAGE 2, COL 2

# More dialogue between Islam and West needed

• FROM PACE 1

"We allow their children to go to Chinese schools, vocational schools, to learn Mandarin. And they practise their culture.

"Chinese New Year is celebrated not only by them, but also by the Malays, the Indians — the Muslims and the Hindus. We have mutual respect."

During the interview, he made it clear that Malaysia belonged to all races.

"Differences between the communities do exist because of the cultural diversity. But we celebrate these differences.

"What we all desire is to be together, to live a life that is peaceful.

"We want to respect others who don't belong to our ethnic group, who's not of the same religion. (We have) a desire to be friendly and to do things together. And, most importantly, this country that we love belongs to all of us, that is Malaysia."

During the interview, Abdullah said that the Quran does not condone violence. And those who resorted to violence had clearly misinterpreted the Holy Book.

"There are specific commandments by God that one should not create or cause violence, especially when it destroys something you've already achieved."

But he admitted it was difficult to persuade the rest of the world that Islam was a religion of peace after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks and the Bali bombings.

"Of course, when incidents like that happen, it is going to be very, very difficult for us to explain. Especially if those involved say 'we have done it in the name of Islam'. That becomes a real problem."

He said there should be more dialogue between Islam and the

West.

"Sept 11, 2001 caused a lot of sadness and the views of the non-Muslims towards Islam has changed dramatically since.

"Today, there doesn't seem to be any mutual understanding to create better rapport between the two.

"To me that is the cause of what we are seeing today. There should be more discussions of how to bring us together, rather than

talking about terrorism."

Abdullah said the West failed to understand that religion was very important to a Muslim.

"To a Muslim, religion is very important. Religion to the Muslim is hot kept at home. It is not a matter for the relatives.

"In the corporate sector, in his business, in the government, in whatever he does, he is very much dictated by the teachings of Islam."