

PM calls on Pope to apologise for remarks

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HAVANA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called on Pope Benedict XVI to apologise for and withdraw remarks linking Islam with violence.

"The Pope's reference to Islam and the Holy Prophet in his lecture is objectionable. This reflects a lack of knowledge and understanding of the religion and its history," Abdullah said yesterday.

During a speech in Germany earlier this week, Pope Benedict cited an obscure Medieval text that characterises some of the teachings of Islam as "evil and inhuman".

The Pope did not explicitly agree with or repudiate the text. The Vatican later said the Pope did not mean the comments to be offensive. Muslim leaders, however, have demanded an apology, and there have been protests in several countries.

"It shows insensitivity to Muslim feelings and would surely hinder the fostering of good relations between Islam and Christianity," said Abdullah, who is in Cuba for the 14th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement.

"Judging by the reactions of various quarters from around

the world, the Pope's words could lead to further tension between religions," said the Prime Minister, who is also the chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

"It is unfortunate that such an eminent figure has not shown leadership in promoting good relations between religions. Instead, his statement has had the effect of sowing more seeds of discord and will not be conducive to dialogue among religions.

"The Vatican must now take full responsibility over the matter and carry out the necessary steps to rectify the mis-

take."

Meanwhile, in Pekan, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the Pope must be more careful and cautious in his comments on Islam.

He said although it might not have been his intention to hurt the feelings of Muslims, he should refrain from making comments that could annoy Muslims.

"We regret the Pope's remarks though it may not be his intention to hurt the feelings of Muslims", he said after opening the Permodalan Nasional Berhad investment exhibition here yesterday.