

'West doesn't understand true nature of Islam'

NST-22/9/2006



ANISYA KAMM
Reporting from
NEW YORK

THE divide between the West and the Muslim world will grow wider and deeper unless the international community is prepared to accept certain facts as the truth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"The fact is that the sense of humiliation being felt by the Muslim world is the root cause for the loss of trust and confidence between Muslims on one side and the Judeo-Christian civilisation on the other side.

"If the international community refuses or fails to accept this fact, then I am afraid we are denying the truth," Abdullah said in his speech at the United Nations general assembly on Wednesday.

Abdullah's speech came at a time when the divide between the two civilisations was probably at its widest ever. He spoke of the suppression of Palestine which was being allowed to fester, the invasion of Afghanistan, the conquest of Iraq and the unrestrained destruction of Lebanon carried out in the name of the war against terrorism.

Abdullah blames much of the prejudices against Muslims to the lack of understanding on the part of the West of the true nature of Islam and what it stands for.

"For instance, there is a lack of appreciation in the West of the role of religion in the lives of Muslims. Modern Europe has generally embraced secularism and largely removed religion from the public domain into the confines of the home and family," Abdullah said.

But for the Muslims, the teach-

ings of Islam serve as a guide for doing all things, whether in the public domain or in their private homes, he said.

"When dealing with Muslims, one cannot separate them from their religion because that is their way of life," he said.

Abdullah drew Malaysia's experience in managing a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, saying the Malaysian Government has embarked on a programme to communicate a proper appreciation of Islam as a force for good.

"We call it Islam Hadhari, which is actually an approach for achieving a progressive society that is compatible with modernity yet firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam."

He said the approach had been accepted by all in Malaysia because the message of Islam Hadhari was a call for equitable development and progress for all.

He said Islam as a religion was not the source of intolerance between the peoples of different faiths as one of the fundamental teachings of Islam was the requirement to respect other religions.

Abdullah asked the assembly not to confuse the evil actions of a small number of extremists who operate within the fringes of Muslim societies as a reflection of the Islamic culture. He called on the world to stop the demonisation of Islam and to remove Islamaphobia.

He said the people of the world had failed to hold dialogues and reach out to one another as fellow inhabitants of the same planet.

"Indeed the greatest discord today exists among the descendants of Abraham. These are the people of the book — the followers of Ju-

daism, Christianity and Islam — who had in fact shared a common beginning in the religion of Abraham," Abdullah.

But dialogues alone would be useless if not followed up by actions. Any dialogue would fail if it was already predetermined that certain states were "rogues," he added.

He cited as example the blatant refusal by certain countries to grant even a hearing to the Hamas faction in Palestine, despite it being elected to power in a democratic election.

As a result, all forms of aid to Palestine were blocked and millions of Palestinians have suffered for months without wages and adequate food.

"Surely, it is irrational and applying double standards to dictate or show preference as to who should be elected into power in the various countries?"

Abdullah said the developed countries must demonstrate flexibility and goodwill in trade talks.

He said in building relations, nations must not be patronising, condescending or threatening.