

PM: Revive the true spirit of Islam

The Star - 13/9/2006

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HELSINKI: Malaysia has called on the Muslim *ummah* to renounce extremism, eradicate radicalism and stop all sectarian violence, and return to the true spirit and teachings of Islam.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Islam could tap into its own rich intellectual tradition and challenge the extremist doctrines that had been unjustifiably linked to the religion.

"The truth must prevail, that Islam abhors and condemns terrorism," the Prime Minister said during the Dialogue Among Cultures and Civilisations at the sixth Asian Europe Meeting (Asem 6) which ended on Monday.

Abdullah, who led the discussion on Western perception towards Islam, was praised by several leaders who walked up to him and thanked him for being very forthright in his speech.

"They told me it was not like the usual diplomatic talk, as I had spoken up for whatever I had known and they appreciated it," he said, noting that French President Jacques Chirac also mentioned it (the Western perception) as something very serious.

"He (Chirac) believed in it and in what this (kind of) relation could do to people," Abdullah said, adding that he was happy to have helped create a bet-

ter understanding on the issues faced by the leaders.

Abdullah said he highlighted the growing loss of confidence between the Western and Islamic worlds, where there was a certain perception among Muslims on what they saw as a concerted effort to humiliate them.

"To me, this is very serious because if one feels humiliated. Of course the response to that kind of situation is very negative," he said.

The Prime Minister said the developing schism must be bridged and it required courage and commitment from both sides to face up to previous wrongs and the conviction that they needed to be put right.

"We must not allow the politics of fear to continue dominating the relations between peoples and nations."

He said Muslim leaders and scholars must succeed in reviving Islam's true spirit, and that the Muslim community alone could not achieve success unless "Islamophobia" was removed.

Abdullah said he also held bilateral talks with Chirac. They discussed issues in the Middle East such as Lebanon, Palestine and Iran.

He told the French leader that Malaysia was fully committed to sending peacekeepers to Lebanon, and would adhere to the United Nations' policies and rules of engagement.