

Plan to solve Muslim woes

• From Brendan Pereira in London

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A PLAN is being cobbled together to address poverty in the Muslim world, a source of some of the vexing problems in that part of the world.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday that he had worked out a plan, but would delay releasing the details until he has spoken to other members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

The plan would likely involve every country contributing to a fund.

The money would then be used to improve the skill levels in the countries where poverty posed a big problem.

Abdullah hinted on the plan during a question-and-answer session after delivering a speech at Asia House. After detailing the progress Malaysia had made economically and its commitment to be a progressive Muslim nation, several Muslims in the audience lobbed some questions from the floor.

One man said he was glad that Malaysia had progressed so well. Now it was, in a position to help eradicate poverty in the Muslim world.

Abdullah noted that he was aware of the responsibility entrusted to him as the chairman of the OIC.

"I am also aware that it is not political leadership that needs to be provided all the time. I have a plan... you will hear about it very, very soon," he said, adding that Malaysia had experience in poverty-eradication programmes. In fact, it was the cornerstone of the New Economic Policy, he noted.

Malaysia was ready to share its experience with any country with a sizeable Muslim population.

"It is about time Muslims did something

worthwhile. Let's not blame others. Let us do more for ourselves and see what we can achieve," he declared to generous applause from an audience which included foreign diplomats and corporate captains.

Abdullah was also asked whether Malaysia had a plan on how to marry knowledge education with Islamic education.

The PM said that ICT was used extensively in the Malaysian education system, but he was less inclined to draw divisions between types of education.

"Knowledge is intrinsic. If he is a good man, he will use knowledge for something good; if he is a crook, he will use knowledge, to cheat people. I don't see why we should distinguish and say that this school is Islamic and that school is not. Islam makes it compulsory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge."

He spent a good portion of his speech showcasing the Malaysian experience of being a progressive Muslim country. He said: "The Malaysian case shows that Islam is not antithetical to democracy. Islam is not an adversary to democracy. The failure to establish or sustain a productive democratic system is not to be laid at the door of Islam, but at the door of underdevelopment."

Abdullah also said Malaysia was exploring the possibility of getting English language teachers from here on a contract basis to help improve the standard of the language in Malaysia.

He broached the subject with British Prime Minister Tony Blair during a meeting at 10 Downing Street on Thursday. He said that the Government was serious in wanting to improve the level of English in the country.

A starting point in that endeavour was to get good teachers, he noted. "Perhaps we can have teachers from England over on a contract basis."