

Blair praises Malaysia

BY K. PARKARAN

LONDON: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has acknowledged that Malaysia is a model Islamic country that should be emulated by the rest of the Muslim world.

He conveyed this to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi when the two premiers met for an hour at Downing Street on Thursday, the first day of Abdullah's three-day working visit to Britain.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who was present at the meeting, said Britain not only recognised Malaysia's leadership in the Islamic world but also among developing countries.

He said Blair told Abdullah that he had heard a lot about Malaysia's moderate Islamic leadership and would like to visit the country to see how it had forged ahead with its policies.

He said Malaysia has tolerance and harmony despite its diversity and on good track record could be emulated by other countries.

Blair felt Malaysia can play a leading role among Muslim countries to bring about peace and understanding in the world, told Malaysian journalists here yesterday.

He said Abdullah invited Blair to reciprocate his visit here.

At a press conference after the meeting, Abdullah described the visit as "very satisfactory and fruitful."

The Prime Minister said he impressed upon Abdullah that the root cause of terrorism was poverty and developed nations should address this urgently.

"I said there must be more understanding, goodwill and tolerance. I also relayed the concerns of the OIC over Iraq and Palestine and the need to resolve the problem in the region," he said.

Speaking at a question and answer session after delivering a keynote address on "Challenges and Prospects for Malaysia in the Millennium," Abdullah said Malaysia convinced that poverty was the root cause of terrorism, he had started a plan to help reduce poverty in Muslim countries.

The initiative, which will be announced soon, involves the pooling of resources of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries and includes the setting up of a fund and providing skills training and financial services Millennium Plan.

A participant from the Union of Muslim Organisation in Iran made a strong plea, ask-



PRIME MINISTER Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (right) was welcomed by Blair (left) at 10 Downing Street in London on Thursday. They held a meeting on bilateral issues. — Bernamagic

Malaysia to fund the successful development of the country to help Vietnam combat terrorism. He has a plan but I have to discuss it with our members before I can announce it. Abdullah invited 400 participants. Malaysia can make a special contribution to

have been very successful in this area, he said. Later the Prime Minister met community leaders of the London Muslim Centre and donated £10,000 (RM20,000) for the East London Mosque where he performed his Friday prayers.