

PM: Tackle extremists to bridge West-Islam gap

NST-31/5/2008

■ By Wan Hamidi Hamid
and Rina de Silva
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: They preach intolerance from the pulpits on Fridays and Sundays. And they spread hate on television and radio talks shows.

They are the men and women who hug extreme positions in the West and Muslim world, and who must be reined in if the widening chasm between the two civilisations is to be bridged.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday took aim at this group, noting that they believed in imposing their religious doctrines or secular ideologies by force.

"In times of confrontation and crisis, the extremes have great appeal. The moderates have a tough time. The extremes fully exploit religious sentiment, nationalism and patriotism.

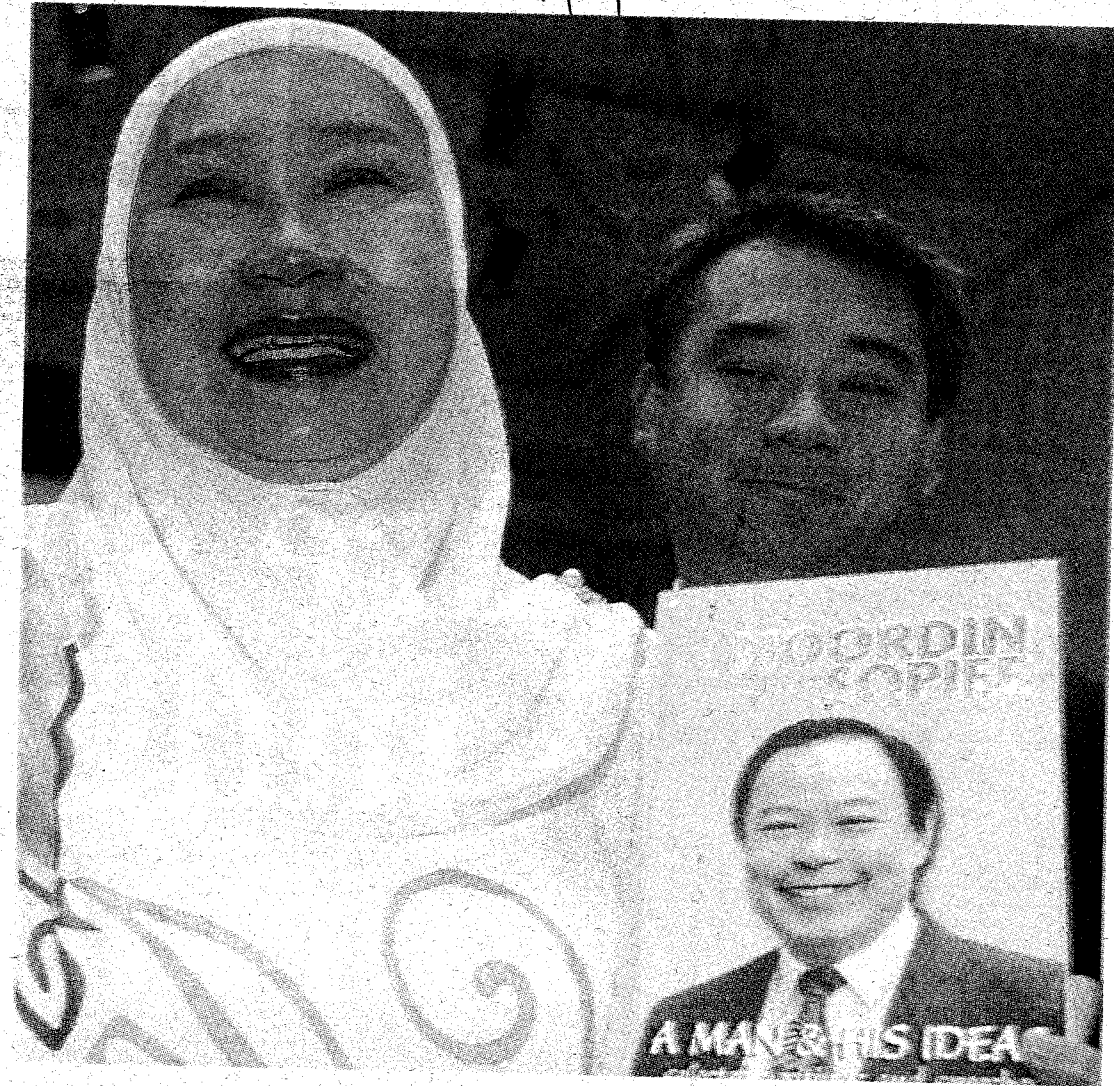
"They play on threats and fears. They wield considerable political power and influence on society," he said when opening the 20th Asia Pacific Roundtable. The meeting, organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, brings together more than 200 experts on international politics and economy.

Abdullah said one way in which Muslim extremists could be tackled was by reforming the curriculum in religious schools.

"They must be transformed from institutions for breeding intolerance and hatred to centres for cultivating human capital that can thrive in the modern economy. They can do this by infusing students, and indeed the entire society, with the true spirit of Islam."

Abdullah cautioned that it would be wrong to frame problems in religious terms only.

"I think you will agree with me that the main factors bedevilling our relations today are political in



Shamsiah with one of the books written by her late husband, while son Johan Sopiee looks on.

nature," he added, noting that the invasion of Iraq, current pressure on Iran over its nuclear capability and denial of help to Palestinians had worsened relations between the West and the Muslim world.

He named three parties as accountable for aggravating relations between the West and the Muslim world — those who commit terror in the name of Islam,

governments which attempt to demonise and criminalise legitimate movements of resistance, and the media.

The media was criticised for giving only a brief and passing mention when he and other Muslim leaders condemned acts of terror.

Earlier, he paid tribute to the late Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee, the former chairman of ISIS who died

in December last year.

Abdullah later handed two books written by Noordin to his widow, Puan Sri Shamsiah Hashim. The books, *A Man and His Ideas — A Compilation of His Speeches and Writings and Twenty Two Years of Asean-Isis: Origin, Evolution and Challenges of Track Two Diplomacy*, will be available in all major bookstores soon.