

'Dialogue can help dispel mistrust'

NST-21/2/2006

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. — Mistrust and fear of Islam is growing every day in the West, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi warned today.

He called for a high-level dialogue between the two sides to prevent disputes such as the one over the Prophet Muhammad cartoons.

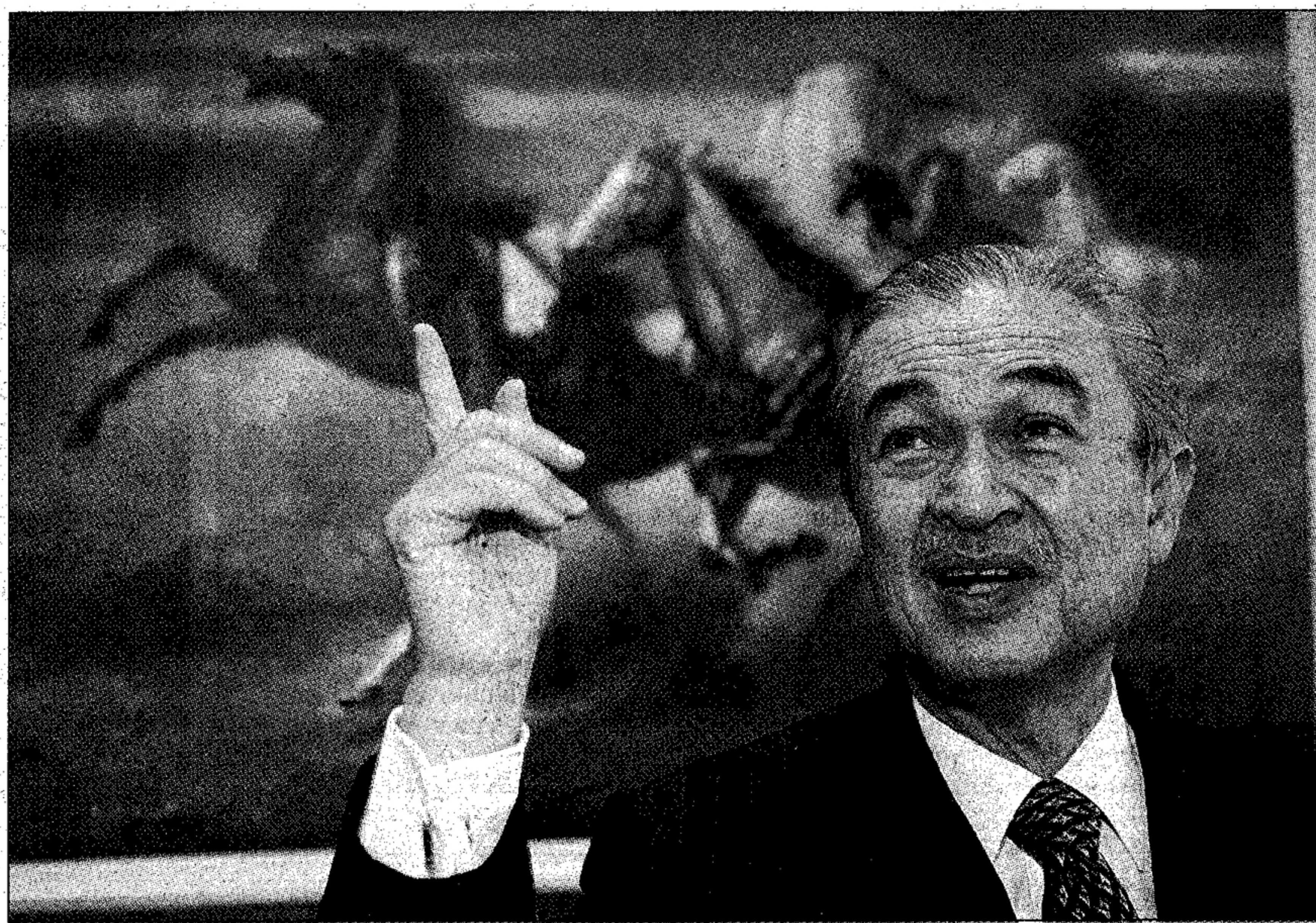
Malaysia, which currently heads the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, is willing to host annual roundtable discussions between Muslims and Westerners to kick-start the dialogue, Abdullah said in an interview.

"Bring anybody. We are not saying you shouldn't come.

"Let's talk. There is a genuine need to see that there is a mutual respect between peoples."

However, the OIC, the world's biggest Islamic grouping with 57 members, had not considered holding such a confidence-building dialogue with the European Union, said Abdullah.

He said the reprinting of the cartoons by some European newspa-



LET'S TALK: Abdullah stressing the urgent need to host roundtable discussions between Muslims and Westerners. — AP picture

pers was a grave provocation, especially when the Muslim world is gripped with a sense of injustice over the US invasion of Iraq and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

"In fact, there was already lack of trust, and now what has happened has further (exacerbated it)," he said.

"It makes us feel that we are liv-

ing in a world of fear and that's no good."

Asked if the cartoon controversy indicates that Europe is becoming xenophobic and anti-Islam, Abdullah said: "I fear that this feeling towards Islam is deteriorating today, and that is a very sad thing.

"We never know where it's going to lead to unless all of us resolve to stop it and do something about it.

"We must deal with it not only by handling the specific issue of the caricatures, but we have to look at the entire spectrum causing these problems."

Abdullah blamed the media for the fear of Islam in the West.

The media failed to report the moderate voices in Islam, instead focusing on terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, he said. — AP