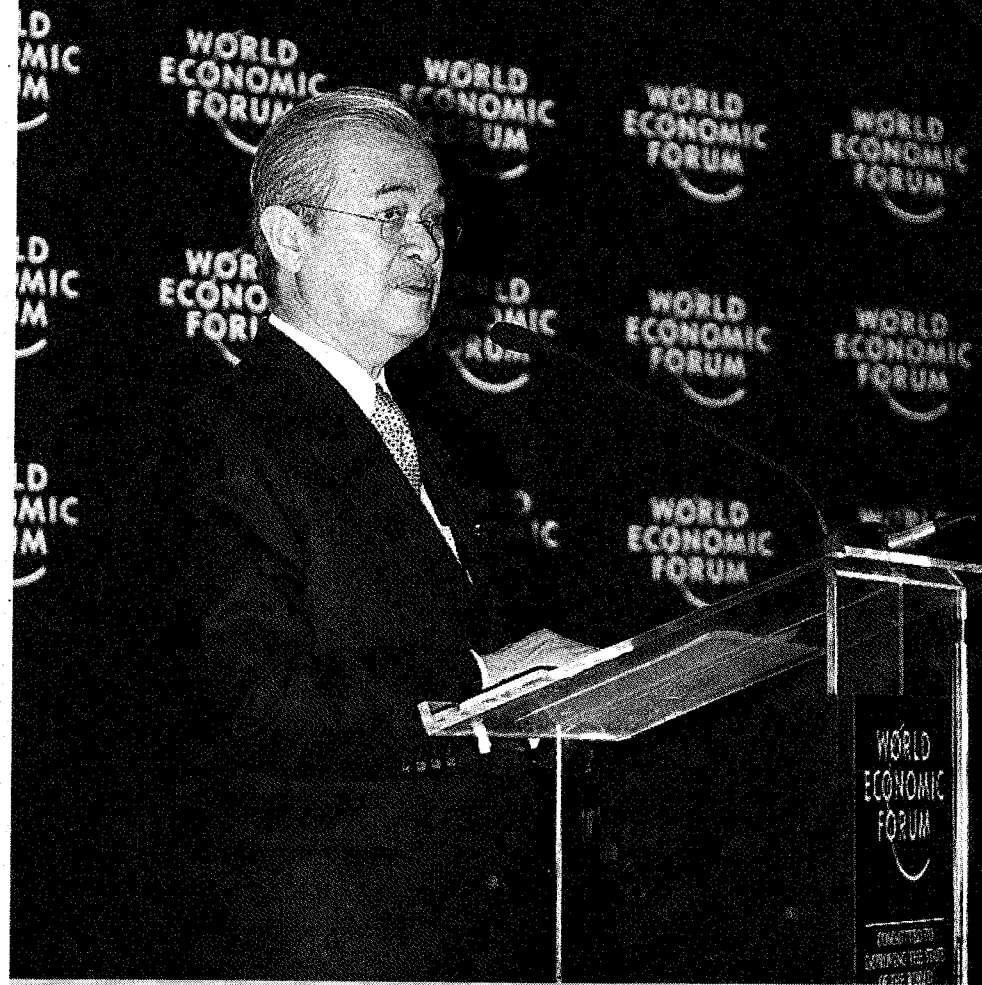


Forum on the Middle East  
Sheikh 20-22 May 2006



VOICE OF REASON: Abdullah delivering his speech at the West Islamic World Dialogue in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, yesterday. — Bernamapic

# Face up to mistakes made, says PM

The Star - 21/5/2006

BY SA'ODAH ELIAS

**SHARM EL-SHEIKH (Egypt):** Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called on both the Muslim and Western worlds to face up to how they have contributed to some of today's problems.

The Prime Minister said unless both sides were willing to accept moral responsibility and take the tough remedial actions needed, there would never be fruitful dialogue between them.

However, he added that both sides were often in denial.

"Any discussion of the real root causes of problems are avoided because that would expose the culpability of some of us," he said yesterday in his remarks to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Council of 100 leaders at the West Islamic World Dialogue.

The session was held prior to the opening of the World Economic Forum on the Middle East here yesterday.

Stressing the importance of dialogue in addressing contentious issues, Abdullah said such engagements between the

Muslim and Western worlds could result in a change of policies.

He warned that if dialogue failed in a time of mutual distrust, fringe elements would take advantage of the situation to convince the people that talks were a waste of time.

Abdullah, who is also the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) chairman, suggested that the WEF convened panel discussions to study the intersections between religion and politics and between religion and society.

"These are the challenges that face Muslims in the West and Western governments with their domestic Muslim populations," he said.

He added that there might be those who claimed that the WEF's primary focus was economic issues.

"But who can claim that religion does not directly impact economic issues? And who can claim that religion does not directly impact politics?" he said.

During the dialogue session, Abdullah said the prolonged

crisis in the Middle East was a cause of great sadness.

Asked about his view on the situation in Iraq, he bluntly said: "The dire situation in Iraq is not caused by the sectarian fighting between the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. It is caused by the continued presence of the United States' occupying force."

To an observation that the Muslims were not only fighting with the Western world but also among themselves, Abdullah said that was not strictly true.

"The Muslims' worst enemies are ignorance, lack of education, illiteracy and abject poverty," he said.

Without education, he added, millions of illiterate Muslims were at risk of being influenced and could easily end up serving the cause of others.

"Thus I believe it is time that the OIC starts giving due attention to the economic development of Muslim countries rather than putting too much emphasis on the politics of peace and war," he said.