

Build nation the Malaysian way, PM suggests to host

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DATUK Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday proposed Malaysia as a template for similarly multi-ethnic, Muslim-majority Bosnia and Herzegovina to reinvent itself in the wake of civil war.

"As a case study in nation-building, we offer the Malaysian political and economic experience to our friends in Bosnia and Herzegovina," the prime minister said.

He went on to describe the painstaking national cohesion that underlay Malaysia's transformation from an agrarian and divided society to the world's 17th largest trading economy.

Speaking at a public lecture at the University of Sarajevo on the second and final day of his official visit, Abdullah said the two countries had much in common, with Bosnia's composition of Muslims, Serbs and Croats roughly equivalent to Malaysia's Malays, Chinese and Indians.

Under the Dayton (peace) Agreement following the civil war of 1992-1995, Bosnia's government is shared between the three ethnic groups through a tripartite presidency and an equal number of seats in parliament.

Though sound in theory, the arrangement still has to be overseen by the international community, whose High Representative has extensive veto powers.

"In a plural society like Malaysia, the need to be just and



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (right) receiving a key from a Bosnian girl to mark the opening of the Malaysia Mosque in Nova Breka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, yesterday. With him is the ulama Mustafa Ceric. Abdullah also performed Friday prayers at the mosque, which cost RM1.8 million to build. — Bernama picture

fair towards all without distinction as to race or religion forms an integral component of the principles in developing a stable, peaceful and prosperous country," Abdullah said.

Justice and fairness necessitated a philosophy of growth with equity as expressed in the New Economic Policy. "The need to ensure an equitable distribution of the

country's wealth is a challenge for us because economic disparities continue to exist among the various ethnic groups."

As the religion of the majority Malays, Islam had been made "the unifying rather than dividing factor in the Malaysian political system" and applied for its universalism, Abdullah said.

"We publicly declare to the peo-

ple of Malaysia that it is the intention of the government to nurture into being a progressive community that is firmly rooted in the noble values and injunctions of Islam but compatible with modernity.

"You can accurately say that the government in Malaysia is Islamic-based, but it governs fairly and justly on behalf of all the multi-ethnic and multi-religious citizens of Malaysia.

"Islam Hadhari calls for the enhancement of the quality of life for everyone, regardless of religious belief. This has ensured domestic peace and gives Malaysia a good name internationally as a tolerant society," he said.

Bosnia, the only country in Europe with a large proportion of Muslims, could show the world that Islam was no barrier to peace and progress. "Bosnia and Herzegovina has the unique opportunity to showcase the true nature of Islam and show by example how Muslims can easily coexist with peoples of other religions."

First, however, it had to achieve unity, without which nation-building would fail.

"In a multiethnic country, no one group can rule alone. Everybody has to be involved and no one must feel marginal, set aside or insignificant."

Unity had to be fostered constantly and the many issues that arose from multiculturalism addressed continuously, Abdullah added.

The prime minister was conferred the Golden Pin, the university's highest honour, for academic achievement and his contributions to economic development.