

Malaysia wins praise from Saudi princess

NSF-26/11/2007

THERE may be sceptics but it is a chance to hear and be heard.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said he was invited to the World Economic Forum by founder Klaus Schwab and took up the offer.

"We want to convey our views. We don't think we are inadequate in terms of experience," he told the Malaysian media yesterday.

The 35-year-old WEF has its fair share of cynics this year as what started as an intimate gathering of top leaders has transformed into a major marketing event for some companies and even countries.

But the forum is still the place to exchange ideas at a global level, which makes it very attractive.

Abdullah's views at a plenary session earlier drew a spirited response from Chief Rabbi David Rosen, president of the International Jewish Committee for Inter-Religious Relations.

The prime minister said that much of the tension between Muslim countries and the West would dissipate if the conflict in Palestine is resolved.

Rosen disagreed. Instead, he said what was needed was for countries to be self-critical. He also blamed the media for highlighting conflicts when there is "wonderful communication" between religions.

"He wants us to be introspective and work to improve our situation. Which is why I have to tell him what Malaysia did," said Abdullah.

At the session, he gave examples of the open house concept during various festivities where the country's various races mingled peacefully and enjoyed each other's company.

The session, chaired by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, also raised the question of how Muslims of different sects can live together in peace.

This led to unexpected praise of Malaysia from another speaker, Saudi Arabia's Princess Lolwah Al-Faisal.

"We have to re-learn religion," she said. Doing so would erase friction between sects like the Sunnis and Shias.

Finding a model nation for this is difficult, she said, but "Malaysia is the closest".