

Defuse tension

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Muslim and Western worlds should work together, says Pak Lah

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LONDON: The Muslim and Western worlds should work together to reduce the influences of intolerance, extremism and militancy that exist on both sides, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"We usually recognise voices of extremism and militancy only on the other side," he said at the International Institute for Strategic

Studies here yesterday. "Extremism and militancy in our own body politics and societies are often not regarded as such. Instead, they are viewed as respectable and patriotic voices that have the interest of the country at heart. They become integral and important parts in our political culture."

Abdullah was speaking on *The*

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»It is incumbent upon us on both sides of the divide to rein in the extremists and moderate their influence upon policy and society«

DATUK SERI ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI

Palestine issue dividing West and Muslim world

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West and the Muslim World: Defusing the Defining Tension of Our Times, before a packed audience, led by IISS chief executive Dr John Chipman.

Citing the Palestine issue as the single most powerful factor dividing the West and the Muslim world, the Prime Minister said that if the issue were resolved, much of the conflicts and instability in the Middle East would disappear.

"It is incumbent upon us on both sides of the divide to rein in the extremists and moderate their influence upon policy and society," he said.

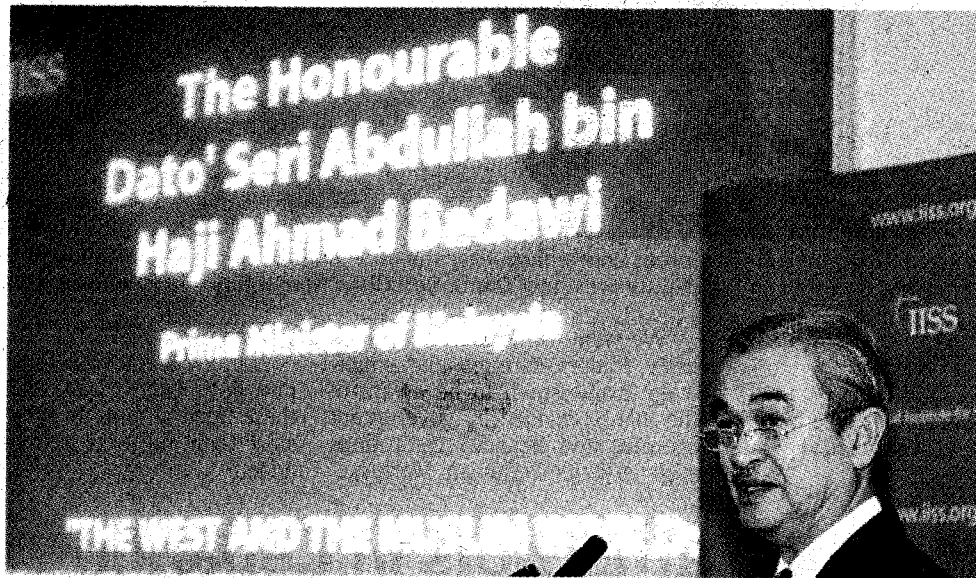
In his strongly worded speech, Abdullah described these forces as dangerous and causing great harm at home and abroad.

He said these conflicting forces mobilised themselves using ideological or religious lines but, in reality, sought power, territory and resources.

He said the United States declared "war" against terrorism after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, and went on to invade Afghanistan and Iraq.

"This in turn led to a sharpening of the conflict with Iran and Syria over the support for the resistance in Iraq," he added.

The Prime Minister said extremist and militant forces could be pervasive in some Muslim



STRAIGHT TALK: Abdullah addressing a packed audience at the IISS in London yesterday. —AFP

societies as some of them preached "a severe and intolerant brand of Islam that rejects the pursuit of wealth."

"They keep Muslims in a state of underdevelopment and backwardness. They preach intolerance of other faiths. They forbid fraternisation with non-Muslims," he said.

Abdullah added that they also denied women "a place of dignity in society" while a few of them "distort the teachings of Islam and the meaning of jihad."

The Prime Minister disagreed that the present tension was a clash of civilisations.

He said there was actually much common

ground in the religions, values and cultures of both sides, citing respect for life, morality, justice, freedom and peace.

On Palestine, he said that if the country were liberated, militant groups such as Hamas and Hizbollah would disband and continue as legitimate political parties.

He added that hostilities between some Western countries and Iran and Syria could also decline.

Regarding Islam Hadhari, he said this concept of "civilisational Islam" was introduced to foster greater development of Muslims and other Malaysians.

"It demonstrates the compatibility of the noble values and injunctions of Islam with the demands of healthy modernity."

Abdullah, who chairs the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, said the OIC wanted to change the 57-nation body from one focusing on political issues and rhetoric to an institution that engages in financial and economic cooperation.

At a brief ceremony earlier, the Prime Minister presented a cheque for RM350,000 for the setting up of the Malaysian Room at the prestigious London School of Economics (LSE).

The money was presented to LSE director Sir Howard Davies. Present was LSE Alumni Society of Malaysia president Datuk Dr Munir Majid.