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# PM: Govts, media key to bridging divide

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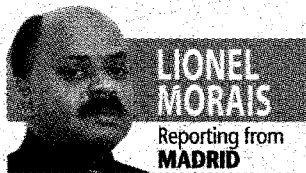
BRIDGING the gap between Christians and Muslims can only work through the efforts of the various governments and the media, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Without commitment from the governments, efforts to bridge the gap between Muslims and the West would not work, he added.

Abdullah was commenting on the two-day First Alliance of Civilisations Forum, aimed at tackling fear and suspicion, bridging divides and overcoming prejudices between Islam and the West.

The forum, which saw the participation of more than 10 present and past leaders and more than 50 foreign ministers and delegates from all over the world, ended yesterday.

"If the governments are not serious in bridging this gap, then the efforts here would not work," he said.



On the role of the media, the prime minister said it should be roped in not only to give coverage to the event, but also to make their readers understand the aim and purpose of the forum.

"This is important as the media has a big and influential role to play," Abdullah said.

"It can influence readers and create reactions to issues which it reports on."

Citing an example of the influence of the media, the prime minister referred to the publication of a caricature of Prophet Muhammad in newspapers several years ago.

"The West thought it was a non-issue which Muslims should not get upset about, but it sparked riots and violent protests by Muslims in various parts of the world."

"For Muslims, the publishing of the caricatures was unacceptable and unforgivable and this caused violent unrest and protests."

Abdullah said if the media understood the issue and was sensitive in its reporting, the problems would not have arisen.

He stressed that Islam teaches its followers to be tolerant, moderate and peaceful and that it forbids violence, and thus, the teachings of the religion cannot be blamed.

"It is political issues which are the underlying factors here."

"And when there is reaction to these political issues, Muslims are seen as the culprits and the teachings of Islam are blamed."

The prime minister ended his two-day visit to Spain by holding bilateral talks with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Abdullah and Zapatero exchanged views on various issues and agreed on the need to further strengthen bilateral ties between their countries, particularly in economy and trade.

Trade between Malaysia and Spain for the first 10 months last year stood at RM3.59 billion.

Abdullah also handed a personal invitation to Zapatero to attend the "3rd Islamic Conference on the Muslim World and the West — Bridging the Gap" in Kuala Lumpur in June.

On the meeting with Ban, Abdullah said the discussions touched on Myanmar.

The UN secretary-general was assured of Asean's continued support on the issue.