

Blair praises Malaysia

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LONDON: British Prime Minister Tony Blair has acknowledged that Malaysia is a model Islamic country that should be emulated by the rest of the Muslim world.

He conveyed this to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi when the two premiers met for an hour at Downing Street on Thursday, the first day of Abdullah's three-day working visit to Britain.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who was present at the meeting, said Britain not only recognised Malaysia's leadership in the Islamic world but also among developing countries.

He said Blair told Abdullah that he had heard a lot about Malaysia's moderate Islamic leadership and would like to visit the country to see how it had forged ahead with its policies.

"He said Malaysia has tolerance and harmony despite its diversity and our good track record could be emulated by other countries.

"Blair felt Malaysia can play a leading role among Muslim countries to bring about peace and understanding," Syed Hamid told Malaysian journalists here, yesterday.

He said Abdullah invited Blair to reciprocate his visit here.

At a press conference after the meeting, Abdullah described it as "very satisfactory and fruitful."

The Prime Minister said he impressed upon Blair that the root cause of terrorism was poverty and developed nations should address this urgently.

"I said there must be more understanding, goodwill and tolerance. I also relayed the concerns of the OIC over Iraq and Palestine and the need to resolve the problems in the region," he said.

Speaking at a question and answer session after delivering a keynote address on *Challenges and Prospects for Malaysia in the Millennium*, Abdullah said Malaysia, convinced that poverty was the root cause of terrorism, had started a plan to help reduce poverty in Muslim countries.

The initiative, which will be announced soon, involves the pooling of resources of the Organisation of Islamic Conference countries and includes the setting up of a fund and providing skills training similar to France's Millennium plan.

A participant from the Union of Muslim Organisations in Britain had made a strong plea, ask-



WARM WELCOME: Abdullah being welcomed by Blair at No 10 Downing Street in London on Thursday. They held talks mainly on international issues. — Bernamapic

ing Malaysia to use its successful poverty eradication programme to help Muslim countries.

"I have a plan but I have to discuss it with OIC members before I can announce it," Abdullah told the 400 participants.

"Malaysia can make a special contribution as

we have been very successful in this area," he said.

Later the Prime Minister met community leaders at the London Muslim Centre and donated £10,000 (RM70,000) for the East London Mosque where he performed his Friday prayers.