Get rid of barrier, Muslims told

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ISLAMABAD: Muslims of the world are now being affected by sectarianism which is blocking them from progress and prosperity, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Prime Minister said sectarianism, or differences in religious interpretation, should not be allowed to be a barrier to forging successful cooperation and collaboration among the *ummah* in the economic field.

"Solve this issue first and then can we talk about unity and cooperation," he said.

He said this in his address during the Keynote Leadership Panel session entitled *Challenges for Muslim leadership in a globalised world* on the last day of the three-day Second World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) here yesterday.

The other panelists were Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, former Sri Lanka president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Abdullah said the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) should now move towards having an economic face.

"The OIC has been long associated with politics and Muslim countries should use the OIC and the WIEF to secure economic clout and help eradicate poverty among their members," he said.

Musharraf agreed with Abdullah and said economic problems among the Muslim countries must be addressed first.

"The OIC is the only vehicle which can unite the Muslim world and come out with ideas to help poorer member countries to come out of the poverty cycle," he added.

Later, Abdullah told Malaysian reporters that the participants of the forum agreed that the OIC's financial institution — the Islamic Development Bank — would be strengthened and made to play a larger role in the implementation of several projects in member countries.

On Malaysia-Pakistan bilateral relations, he said Musharraf was happy with the current situation as well as new alliances made in many fields between the two countries.

On an unrelated matter, Abdullah said Malaysia had agreed to a request from Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for it to initiate the latest round of negotiations with rebels in the southern part of the country.

It was reported that Philippine negotiators might sign a preliminary pact with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on Muslim territorial claims in the southern Philippines soon.

Abdullah arrived home from Pakistan early this morning.

YAYASAN PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION