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Clinton: M'sia a role model

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'Country's harmony and tolerance should be emulated'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Bill Clinton has expressed admiration for Malaysians, saying that their ability to respect other people's faiths should be emulated by all.

The former US president said the world would be a better place if it emulated Malaysia's harmony and social tolerance.

"Malaysia is the model that there is hope for the future. The people here who are from varied races, religions and all sorts of background who have learned to work together and stay together.

"This is what the world should be like," he said, adding that memories of "this remarkable nation will forever be in my mind".

The 42nd US president, who visited the KL Bird Park earlier, said he met two Muslim women who came up to greet him.

"It is this ability to respect people's faith that I admire in Malaysia. If only everyone could look another person in their eye and welcome them to their common space, what a different world we would have."

Clinton, who was in Malaysia for the first time, spoke in a packed hall during the inaugural Tan Sri BC Sekhar memorial lecture here yesterday. It was broadcast live over Astro Awani.

The BC Sekhar Memorial Lecture series is the brainchild of Datuk Vinod Sekhar, the youngest son of BC Sekhar.

One of the aims of the Sekhar Foundation, the philanthropic organisation set up by Vinod, is to foster greater mutual understanding among the peoples of the world.

The late BC Sekhar, fondly known as Mr Natural Rubber, dedicated his life to rubber research and development in the country.

Clinton also noted that political conflict was a "good thing", adding that disagreements or discussions only promoted thinking.

"My wife, Hillary, and I also disagree on many issues but it is this disagreement that allows thinking. It is healthy to have discussions," he said.

Clinton, who turned up half an hour late for the lecture scheduled for 6pm, noted that he was held up by the heavy traffic.

"Given the current economic climate, having that much traffic indicates that your economy



Courtesy visit: Abdullah receiving Clinton during the latter's courtesy visit to his office in Putrajaya yesterday. — Bernama

is doing just fine," he said to laughter from the crowd, which included local politicians and other prominent figures.

Earlier, Clinton paid a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, visited the KL Bird Park and shopped for souvenirs for his wife and daughter.

During the forty-minute lecture, Clinton touched on an array of topics ranging from climate change, health issues, global interdependence and empowering people to take control of their lives.

During the question-and-answer session, Clinton said he was even more proud of his wife now that she had been chosen to be the US Secretary of State.

"The country will have a good economic and national security team," he added.

Clinton later received the BC Sekhar Medal for transformational leadership.