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Dr M to open Europe-Islamic world seminar

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open the "Malaysian-European Union Joint-Seminar: Europe and The Islamic World" at the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia tomorrow.

The Prime Minister will deliver the keynote address at the seminar, to be attended by 250 people.

The seminar is organised by Ikim and the British-based Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and is supported by the EU. The New Straits Times is the official newspaper for the event.

Also attending are representatives of 15 EU member nations. They are Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

The European Commission is the EU's executive arm that is responsible for implementing integration policies and represent member nations in international negotiations.

There will also be a dialogue session with Dr Mahathir and the EU representative Michel Caillouet, the ambassador and head of delegation of the EC.

Based in Bangkok, Caillouet has served two of his four-year terms as the head of delegation for Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand.

In an interview, Caillouet said as one of a series of high-level dialogues among academicians, researchers and sociologists, the seminar will provide the means to learn from each other.

The EU provides financial support for the "Europe and the Islamic World" seminar to encourage mutual understanding between Europe and this region of the world.

"There are 11 million Muslims of the 370 million people in the EU and, like Malaysia, we have an egalitarian society. We are interested in the Malaysian experience.

"It should be a frank dialogue as we have to work together.

"It is necessary for Malaysians to understand the European experience because we face the same challenges in this fast changing world."

Caillouet said European integration through the EU should be seen in the same light as the integration of Southeast Asian nations through Asean "as we are working together for peace".

The framework of the EU was complex because, he said, "while we are in the process of integrating, we are 15 different countries, each a sovereign nation with its own identity."

Caillouet said this seminar was considered as part of the common effort for mutual understanding between Europe and Asia and would be useful for the Asia-Europe meeting in London next month.

Asem is made up of all 15 European Union members, seven Asean countries and China, South Korea and Japan. The first Asem was held in Bangkok in 1996.

He said the EU maintained a tradition of providing financial, technical and humanitarian aid to countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam for development and training programmes in rural areas.

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