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Seminar to give Europe a better insight into Islam

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to open a two-day "Malaysian-European Union Joint Seminar: Europe and the Islamic World" on March 24.

He will also deliver a keynote address at the seminar, organised by the Malaysian Institute of Islamic Understanding and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

The seminar is to enable Europeans to have a better understanding of the role of Islam in a multi-religious country like Malaysia.

Ikim director-general Datuk Ismail Ibrahim said they had decided to organise it following suggestions by several ambassadors from European countries who were impressed with the extent of tolerance and harmony in Malaysia.

"Having worked in this country, they felt other Europeans should also have the opportunity to see for themselves how Islam is being practised in Malaysia," he added.

Consultants from Britain, Spain and Italy were appointed to organise the seminar with Ikim and the Oxford Centre as a substantial part of its funding comes from the European Union.

Some 25 participants from Europe and 25 from Malaysia have been invited to attend. About 400 others are expected to attend the opening and closing ceremonies.

Ismail said the Europeans had insisted that the seminar be held in Malaysia in view of the impact of Dr Mahathir's speech on Islam - The Misunderstood Religion on the Muslim and non-Muslim world.

It was delivered at the Oxford Centre on April 16, 1996.

Said Ismail: "It is timely for Europeans to understand how Malaysia has infused Islamic values into politics, business, education and other aspects of social life."

He said dialogue between European and local academicians, politicians, clergymen, and non-governmental organisations would "hopefully bridge the gap" and increase mutual understanding.

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