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US ACADEMICIANS NOW HAVE BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR, March 13 (Bernama) -- Six faculty members of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania will return to the US with a much clearer understanding of Malaysia tomorrow.

Malaysia is one of the countries which had been greatly misunderstood by the American public.

The faculty members had come to Malaysia to better understand its economy, history, culture, politics and religion.

The week-long visit was also for them to pursue their scientific research interests and seek answers for their research questions.

Associate Dean for International Relations at the Wharton School, Jeffrey A. Sheehan, said the visit enabled them to clear misconceptions about Malaysia and the highlight of their visit was a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim. They also spoke with top corporate figures.

Speaking at a press conference here, Sheehan said the visit was to help the school become more international in preparing its students.

Saying that the visit was arranged before the currency turmoil began in the region, he also said that he was impressed by the close relationship between the government and private sector in Malaysia, especially in strengthening to build a solid technology base.

Among the misunderstandings was the position of women in Malaysia, said Steffanie L. Wilk, Assistant Professor of Management in the Human Resources Group at the school.

Wilk said with Malaysia, being an Islamic country, there has been a perception that the women's role is not prevalent in society.

But during her visit, she found out there are many Malaysian women in high positions and they are also very articulate and well-versed in their fields.

Olivia S. Mitchell, Wharton's International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans and Professor of Insurance and Risk Management and Executive of the Pension Research Council, said the meeting with Dr Mahathir had given her the impression that the prime minister has a long-term vision for the country.

Another occasional misunderstanding is the imbalance of the balance of payment between the US and other countries. There have been fears that the countries are making a competitive devaluation of their currencies to enhance their exports, said Marshall E. Blume, Wharton's Howard Butcher III Professor of Finance and Director of the Rodney L. White Center for Financial Research.

Blume said the people here seemed to like if their currencies strengthened against the US dollar and not the opposite.

Wharton's Assistant Professor in the Multimanagement Group in Management Department, Adrian E. Tschoegl said Malaysia's banking sector is well-managed and he does not expect any problems as Bank Negara, which is monitoring the sector, has demonstrated a lot of professionalism. --

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