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Participants seek common goals to advance ummah

SCHOLARS and representatives from Muslim communities are enthusiastic about the Mahathir Dialogue and are hoping to share experiences and develop common goals for the advancement of the ummah.

Dr Shakeela Z. Hassan, an Associate Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago's Department of Anesthesia and Critical Care, said she appreciated the opportunity to learn about the problems faced in achieving Malaysia's diversity and unity.

"In America we have achieved a commendable amount of success, but we are still trying to do our best," she said after briefing sessions at the Cyberview Lodge, Cyberjaya yesterday.

Dr Shakeela is active in pursuing unity for Muslim communities and has initiated several community programmes and grassroots fundraising activities.

"We have gone all over to communities of various origins, and people are realising that we have to work together.

"Once you gain selfrespect and you respect your neighbour, Muslim or not, you will get respect in return - this is what they are learning," she said.

Dr Mohammed Hashim Ludin, an Afghan affairs activist and analyst, said he hoped to learn the secrets of Malaysia from the dialogue.

"So many ethnic groups and cultures are living together in harmony and are genuinely happy.

"We wish to find out how the Malaysian model started and how to use that for the development of other Muslim countries," he said.

Ludin had been residing in Belgium for many years and had been the presidential adviser to the Kabul Government between 1977 and 1978, and consultant to the Afghan Government from 1969 to 1977.

At the moment, he said, Malaysia was the country that could be used as an example of the development of a modern Islamic state with all of the tolerance and positive ideologies inherent in the religion.

Aminah Beverly McCloud, an Associate Professor in Islamic Studies and Religious Studies in Depaul University, US, said she was learning a lot from other participants.

"In this dialogue we are going to discuss what is going on in different places, especially those in the Muslim world, with respect to what happened after Sept 11."

McCloud, who has also acted as a legal expert in several criminal and divorce cases in the US, said the event gave her an opportunity to learn about issues with which she was unfamiliar.

"I needed to learn something about economics and I did not know much about Malaysian society.

"We have just been briefed about the country's constitution and economics," she said.

She said she was also still thinking about what questions to raise at the dialogue.