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Achievements in balancing Islam and modernity impress foreign ulama

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THE choice of Malaysia as the venue for the first World Conference of Islamic Scholars was a hands down decision due to the country's impressive achievement in balancing modernity and Islam.

International ulama participating in the conference which starts tomorrow viewed Malaysia as an example of a very successful Islamic state with its development equal to that of a developed nation.

The conference's implementation committee chairman Datuk Nakhaie Ahmad said the ulama were greatly impressed with Malaysia's ability to develop the country into a modern nation without sacrificing Islamic values and principles.

"When we proposed that the conference be held here, they all agreed," he said when met at the Putrajaya Marriot Hotel here tomorrow.

The ulama were also in unison in supporting the setting up of a permanent secretariat here, the details of which will be fine-tuned during the three-day meeting, said Nakhaie.

He added that having a permanent secretariat would enable it to organise discussions and workshops on a regular basis.

"We are also looking at making this conference an annual event," he said.

Since yesterday, 50 per cent of the foreign participants have arrived while the rest are due later tonight and tomorrow morning, said Nakhaie adding that the list of foreign delegates had grown from the initial 80 to 90.

Participation from the locals was also overwhelming with some 800 confirming their attendance from the earlier target of 600.

"From this very encouraging response, we know that they expect something constructive would come out from this conference."

Among the objectives of the conference are to bring forth resourceful ideas to the Muslim ummah, to widen their minds and separate religious issues from political affairs and to elucidate the true meaning of Islam to ward off irresponsible and extreme quarters.

The conference would also be a platform for Malaysia to share its experience in developing Islam, the economy and politics.

Nakhaie said the two local presenters, National Economic Action Council executive director Datuk Mustapa Mohamed and Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Marican would provide the Malaysian perspective in the management of the country's economy and natural resources.

He said the preparations for the conference, a brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad were running smoothly.

The conference, to be opened by Dr Mahathir and closed by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, will see the tabling of 22 working papers on various issues affecting the ummah.

One of the prominent participants is Egypt's Al-Azhar University Sheikh, Dr Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi, who will deliver his keynote address on Friday.