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Over 1,300 to take part in SARS meet

Annie Freeda Cruetz

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - On Tuesday, 1,300 scientists, health professionals and practitioners from 192 countries will meet here to discuss prevention of another major outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Up to yesterday, SARS had infected 8,445 people and claimed 790 lives worldwide.

The two-day World Health Organisation Conference on SARS will review the scientific findings on SARS, examine the process of public health intervention and find ways to prevent another major outbreak.

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam acting WHO representative Dr R.W.K. Gee said the SARS situation was now under control.

Speaking at the Health Ministry today, Dr Gee said the participants would also discuss measures at hospitals to protect healthcare providers from infection.

Participants include WHO Western Pacific regional director Dr Shigeru Omi and director-general Gro Harlem Brundtland, who are both scheduled to meet Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Wednesday.

Dr Gee confirmed that scientists from Taiwan were also attending the conference, dispelling speculation that China did not want Taiwanese scientists to participate.

"WHO, in co-ordination with the Chinese Government, agreed that scientists from Taiwan will participate," he added.

Health Ministry secretary-general Datuk Alias Ali said the Asean Health Ministers Special Meeting on SARS, which ended in Cambodia two days ago, declared Asean SARS-free. They agreed on a joint action plan to prevent a recurrence of the disease.