

Conference to Mobilize Malaysia-Indonesia Alumni for Mutual Benefit

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KUALA LUMPUR, (Bernama) -- Malaysia-Indonesia bilateral ties enter a new chapter tomorrow when 1,500 Malaysian and Indonesian university alumni gather for a conference to discuss ways to mitigate the ills of globalisation.

Two policy papers will be taking centre stage at the one-day conference, one of which deals with the threat posed by globalisation while the second paper focuses on how the Malaysia-Indonesia alumni can combine efforts to develop the Islamic economy and make it the thrust of the national economy.

Both policy papers are very relevant, more so at a time when many countries are expressing concern over the damaging effects of western influence on national identity and nobleness of eastern cultures and values. Many countries, Islamic nations included, are watching helplessly as the west, under various guises, continues to gain the upper hand over their economies.

Tomorrow's conference, dubbed the Nusantara Alumni Gathering, is spearheaded by the Malaysian-Indonesian People's Alliance Foundation (YIRMI) and will be held at the International Islamic University Malaysia's (IIUM) campus in Gombak. The participants comprise Malaysians who graduated from Indonesian universities and Indonesians who graduated from Malaysian universities.

"These thousand-over intellectuals are a force to reckon with and they have yet to be mobilised for the benefit of the two nations," YIRMI Malaysia Chairman and founder Tan Sri Dr Rais Yatim told Bernama, recently.

He said being professionals in various fields, they were capable of contributing brilliant ideas to help resolve the sociocultural and economic problems their nations were currently grappling with.

The first-ever Nusantara Alumni Gathering is scheduled to be opened by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who has always championed closer ties between Malaysia and Indonesia and whose thoughts were always highlighted by the Indonesian mass media.

Rais, who is also IIUM President and the Malaysian government's sociocultural advisor,

said Ahmad Zahid would also launch the university's Nusantara Alumni Network, whose main task was to ensure the realisation of the the resolutions passed at the conference.

Besides Rais, Indonesia's former Justice and Human Rights Minister Prof Dr Yusril Ihza Mahendra will also deliver a keynote address at the conference.

YIRMI Indonesia Chairman Saiful Hadi told Bernama that it would not be surprising if the Nusantara Alumni Gathering's resolutions were eagerly anticipated by other countries which wished to implement them as well.

"This is because as far as I know no other nation, whether in West Asia or in our region, has an effective model to counter the ill effects of globalisation on their younger generation, as well as on their economy," he said.

He is impressed with Rais' vision and farsightedness in taking the initiative to organise the conference, as it would not only serve to strengthen Malaysia-Indonesia ties but would benefit the world as well.

Perhaps, it is still too early for these two nations - that have deeply embedded similarities in terms of history, culture and religion - to draw up a comprehensive Islamic economic model which is holistic and fair to all the people, but it is imperative that the countries take the first step towards that direction.

"Our countries already have well established syariah banking systems... now we have to venture further to inject Islamic principles into other aspects, one at a time.

"Hopefully, our future generations will continue with these efforts that will enable our two countries to make vast contributions for the benefit of the people," added Saiful.

One of the objectives of the conference is to gather the views and ideas of students, lecturers, cultural experts and Islamic economic experts who will actively participate in the debates following the tabling of the two policy papers.

They are also expected to come up with new ideas that are not only practical but can revitalise and project the Islamic economic system as a superior alternative to the existing conventional one.

The first policy paper on 'Strengthening National Identity to Counter Ills of Globalisation through Alumni Cooperation' will be presented by YIRMI Deputy Chairman Prof Datuk Dr Firdaus Abdullah and former Indonesian Parliament Speaker Dr Marzuki Alie.

The second paper on Developing the Islamic Economy into a Thrust of the National Economy through Alumni Cooperation will be tabled by UNIMAP senior lecturer and expert in Islamic economy Dr Wuri Handayani and Utusan Malaysia New Media news editor Lukman Ismail.

For Bernama Editor-in-Chief Datuk Zakaria Abdul Wahab, the YIRMI initiative was timely in view of the various challenges posed by globalisation. The conference, he said, would create more awareness on the educational links between Malaysia and Indonesia, which has given rise to thousands of alumni who were professionals and have the capacity to contribute to the development of their respective nation.

"The alumni's cooperation should be used as the thrust to further strengthen Malaysia and Indonesia's ties in view of the similarities they share, not to mention economic cooperation and speaking out on matters of joint importance at international platforms," he said.

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