

Forget the past, PM tells Murayama

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KUALA LUMPUR: Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama's goodwill tour of South-East Asia hit a bright note in Malaysia whose government prefers to look to the future rather than harp on "actions in the past."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad set Murayama at ease when they met for talks yesterday by giving an assurance that the Government would "not recommend" moves by the people to seek compensation over actions of the past.

Dr Mahathir also told Murayama he could not understand why the Japanese government kept on apologising for war crimes committed 50 years ago.

When he visited Vietnam and the Philippines, Murayama had — like his predecessors — apologised for the actions of the Japanese army, including forcing many of their women to be "comfort women" or sex slaves. Malaysia is the third leg of his four-nation tour.

The two leaders met for about 2½ hours and the gist of

their discussions was related to reporters by Japanese Foreign Ministry deputy director-general for public information Kishichiro Amae.

He said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad did not specifically mention the word "comfort women" but gave the assurance Malaysia would "not recommend" that its people seek compensation from the Japanese government for actions in the past.

His reason for this was that if one asked for compensation for something which happened 50 years ago, what about compensation for affairs which occurred a 100 or 200 years ago during colonial rule?

Amae said Dr Mahathir stressed instead on the importance of taking lessons from the past.

"Dr Mahathir said in the relations between nations it is necessary to look instead to the future based on the present relationship," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir said it was necessary for Japan to see how it could play a role in creating a better world.

Amae also said he had no information on whether Murayama responded to the issue of compensation.