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Finland-Education
BOOST TO ASIA-EUROPE EDUCATION COOPERATION

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's proposal on the Asia-Europe university programme has gained strength with the holding of a dialogue between Finnish and Malaysian educational authorities here today.

A 35-member delegation from Finland met Malaysian Education Ministry officials and education experts to discuss higher technical and economics education.

The dialogue was very timely and relevant to Malaysia as the Second Outline Perspective Plan (SOPP) has forecast that Malaysia would require about 56,600 engineers in the year 2000, Education Ministry Secretary-General Datuk Dr Johari Mat told reporters after the meeting.

Malaysia and Finland should mutually benefit from the strengths and opportunities available in both their higher educational systems, he said.

Dr Johari said the government had asked the ministry to take the lead role in setting up a centre for Asian and East Asian Studies and twinning programmes between European and Asian universities.

At the Asia-Europe meeting in Bangkok recently, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad suggested that European universities establish twinning programmes with their Asian counterparts or set up branches in Asia under the Asia-Europe university programme.

According to him, Malaysia currently has 26,500 engineers.

"The local higher education institutions can only produce 21,000. There is still a gap and the need to produce a further 9,100 engineers from other sources," he said.

He said the demand for assistant engineers was even more critical, with a projected need of 195,300 such skilled manpower by the year 2000 against the present "stock and forecast output" of 156,470 from local institutions.

He said with Finland's emphasis on technical and vocational education, including its polytechnics known as AMK Institutes, the ministry believed it could help deliver the kind of training required by Malaysia.

He also said Malaysia was giving equal importance on the need to produce good managers and economists to manage, sustain and further increase the present economic development.

"A concerted effort should be made to generate opportunities and academic cooperation between the two countries and there should be a win-win situation for both countries," he said.

Head of the Finnish delegation Jukka Lahtinen said the visit was part of a national strategy to train experts in Asian business culture and management.

A programme known as "Promoting New Industries Through Education", launched in 1992, had been internationalised to create international education-industry networks for Finnish polytechnics, specifically in Europe, Asia Pacific and Russia, he said.

Through the Asia Pacific pilot project, a group of polytechnics has started training staff for Asian contacts, developed the curriculum for increasing the students' knowledge of Asia Pacific and established student and staff exchange programmes.

Lahtinen said trade between Finland and Malaysia was in good balance and Malaysia was said to be the only country in Asia to achieve such a situation.

According to him, imports and exports between the two countries increased 200 percent to US\$450 million last year compared to 1990.

The Finnish universities offer almost 200 programmes in information and telecommunications technology, forestry and wood-based products, oil refinery and business administration at the graduate and post-graduate levels, he said.

The Nordic country, with a land area of 338,000 sq km and a population of just over five million, has 28 polytechnics and 21 universities.

The visitors include officials of the Finland National Board of Education.-- BERNAMA

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