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Look East

LOOK EAST POLICY TAKES ON NEW FOCUS

By: M.Jegathesan

TOKYO, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- The decade-old Look East Policy has taken a new focus -- to provide skills training for Malaysians in hi-tech industries and set-up factories in Malaysia, Malaysia's ambassador to Japan Tan Sri Mohamed Khatib Abdul Hamid said here today.

"We want engineers trained here to become suppliers of components to Japanese companies and distance ourselves from the practice of training Malaysians to work for only Japanese companies," he said.

The Japanese Government had agreed to extend the policy, which is now in its 14th year, to the year 2000, he said in an interview with Malaysian journalists, who are in Japan under the Foreign Press Centre Asia-Pacific Fellowship Programme.

The policy was introduced in early 1980's by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad aimed at inculcating good working ethics among Malaysians by looking to Japan and South Korea.

Since 1984, the number of Malaysians sent to Japan for skills and educational training had increased. A total of 1,163 students had gone to the country for academic pursuits between 1984 and 1986.

He said 677 trainees were sent for technical training and 95 teachers to learn Japanese language during the same period.

Khatib said the new focus was crucial to achieve Vision 2020 to turn Malaysia into a developed country and was in line with Malaysia's new industrial masterplan which emphasises on hi-tech industries and component parts manufacturing rather than labour-intensive industries.

Malaysia's rapid economic growth has not been spared from hitches. Among the serious ones are manpower shortage which had led to the influx of foreign workers and the current account deficit in the balance of payments.

Khatib also said from now on students sent to Japan would be trained in specific industries in line with the new approach

"Malaysia needs bold and visionary entrepreneurs to sell their products worldwide. As we move into the next stage of industrial development, the wage earner mentality has to be erased," he said.

Khatib said it was costly to send Malaysians to Japan only for undergraduate programmes, adding that "for every one student sent to Japan, we can send four to the United States."

Besides acquiring the knowledge and skills, it was vital for Malaysians to establish business connections with Japanese businessmen, he said.

He also said that 134 students from the Mara Education Foundation are here on a special programme to train 200 engineers.

"We hope these post-graduate students will become masters in their respective fields and set the stage for Malaysia's new industrialisation programme," he added. -- BERNAMA

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