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Financial aid: Japanese group to meet officials

A JAPANESE delegation will meet Finance Ministry and National Economic Action Council officials today to discuss Japan's financial assistance programme to Malaysia.

The delegation, led by Finance Ministry's director of international market Kishimoto Shuhei, arrived late yesterday for the one-day visit. They are also expected to meet First Finance Minister and NEAC chairman Tun Daim Zainuddin.

It was understood that their trip to Malaysia was initiated after Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa recently expressed surprise that Malaysia had yet to receive its portion of the Japanese fund for Asian economies hit by the prolonged financial crisis.

The US\$30 billion (RM114 billion) fund, announced last October, was aimed at helping Asian countries recover from the economic crisis.

Last Saturday, Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed told the New Straits Times in London that Japan had given the assurance it would find out why its fund had yet to be disbursed.

He was given the assurance after meeting Miyazawa during last week's Asia-Europe Finance Ministers Meeting in Frankfurt, Germany.

"He appeared surprised that there had not been much movement and said he would look into it," he said.

The Finance Minister, Mustapa added, thought everything had been cleared for Malaysia and Thailand.

Malaysia was scheduled to receive some of the US\$5 billion by the end of last year.

In a recent interview with Japanese daily Mainichi Shimbun, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Japan's aid package was so "slow-footed" that the financial crisis would be over before it was spent.

"The package was 'very effective' for Asian countries," Dr Mahathir had told the newspaper.

Malaysia had requested a US\$5 billion loan facility for infrastructure projects.

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