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Look East Policy still relevant to Malaysia: DPM

Zainul Ariffin in Tokyo

TOKYO, Thurs: The Look East Policy, introduced in the early 1980s, continues to remain relevant for Malaysia especially in view of its current emphasis on the development of knowledge-based economy, says Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Certainly, he said, the core elements within Japan and the Japanese society that the policy sought to take advantage of - such as human resource development, technology transfer and work ethics - would remain beneficial to Malaysia in the general implementation of its K-economy plan.

These again were areas that Japan could be of assistance.

The policy entails a conscious attempt by Malaysia to emulate certain aspects of Japanese culture as well as to tap into Japan's wealth of resources.

Abdullah, who was on the second of his five-day visit to Japan, was responding to a question on the relevance of the policy to Malaysia now and in the future during a meeting with more than a dozen Japanese journalist here yesterday.

The one-hour meeting with more than a dozen journalists touched on a number of subjects including the state of the Malaysian economy, Islamic extremism, kidnappings by Filipino rebels, his reading of the Japanese economy as well as leadership succession in Malaysia.

On the Multimedia Super Corridor project, Abdullah said it is going along fine, and encouraged more Japanese companies to set up shops there.

Malaysia was addressing the human resource situation for the information technology (IT) project by developing the Universiti Multimedia, as well as a plan to bring in 5,000 world-class experts in IT there within five years.

Abdullah also said the current meeting of the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC II) should likely come up with something with regard to human resource development in the IT area.

When the NECC was set up 10 years ago to chart the masterplan for the country's economic growth, the IT industry did not figure much in the Malaysia's horizon.

Abdullah, however, declined comment on expectations that he would replaced Dr Mahathir.

As far as he was concerned, Abdullah said, he had a job to do and he would do it as best he could. As for Dr Mahathir, he said, both him and the Barisan Nasional felt that the Prime Minister should continue to lead the country.

Asked about the arm heist incident allegedly carried out by the Al-Maunah group and a possibility of extremism rearing its ugly head in Malaysia, Abdullah declined comment, saying the case was in the court now.

Nevertheless, he said there was little support for such actions in Malaysia as seen from the fact that there were no demonstration or violence when the alleged perpetrators of the crime were arrested and tried.

Malaysia, he said, abhor extremism in any form, and would do what it could to nip it in the bud.

With regard to fear among Japanese tourists following incidents of kidnappings by Filipino rebels in Malaysian waters off the coast of Sabah, he said the military and the police were now looking after the security

matters there and that should deter similar incidents in the future.

The whole country, he said, was essentially still a safe place.

Abdullah was also asked about the situation in the Korean peninsular. He said Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) felt that North Korea was an intergral part of the region hence the grouping invited Pyongyang to take part in the Asian Regional Forum that discussed issues of stability and security in the region.

It was important to engage the country not only politically but also economically.

On US' plans to expand bilateral military cooperations with countries in the region, such as Thailand and the Philippines, into a multilateral arrangement, Abdullah said Malaysia was currently involved in several military exercises with its neighbours as well as the US. However, to go beyond the current arrangement was something that Malaysia needed to look into, he added.

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