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Malaysia offers site for Asean-Japan university

Kamarul Yunus

MALAYSIA has offered to host the proposed Asean-Japan university, which is aimed at increasing the pool of technical workers in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean), particularly Malaysia.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia's successful "Look East" policy is an advantage for the country to house the proposed university.

"Our experience in terms of the 'Look East' policy is a strong point in Japanese-Malaysian relations," he told newsmen after attending a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and visiting Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Putrajaya yesterday.

During the leaders' meeting, Syed Hamid said, Koizumi voiced Japan's appreciation for the "Look East" policy which the Japanese premier described as successful and a symbol of the strong relationship between Malaysia and Japan.

He said the setting up of the university will provide unemployed skilled Japanese manpower with the opportunity to assist in the development of a bigger technical workforce in the region.

"Koizumi said Japan is keen on Dr Mahathir's idea of making use of skilled Japanese workers who are unemployed to involve themselves in technical fields in Asean and Malaysia.

"Malaysia's offer is not only in respect of technical training ... it must be upgraded to university level. Thus, Malaysia is willing to supply the site for the Asean-Japan university to provide technical cooperation and to train students in Asean and other regions," he said.

More than 1,000 Malaysian students have been sent to study in Japan under the "Look East" policy.

However, it is expensive for Malaysian and Asean students to pursue their studies in Japan. As such, Syed Hamid said, the setting up of such a university will reduce the cost of learning from the Japanese and at the same time reach more people throughout the Asean region.

Koizumi, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur from Manila yesterday, is on a week-long visit to the region aimed at expanding relations with Asean countries.

This is his first trip to the region since becoming Prime Minister last April. He had planned to embark on the trip in September last year, but had to postpone it following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US.

During the meeting with Dr Mahathir, Syed Hamid said, Koizumi gave his assurance that Japan would continue to provide Malaysia with financial assistance to carry out development programmes.

"Japan has always given loans to Malaysia. Malaysia will continue to be able to access yen loans under Official Development Assistance (ODA)," he said.

Prior to his leaving for the Asean trip, Koizumi was quoted by the media that he was expected to discuss prospective cuts in Japan's ODA with Indonesia and other South-East Asian leaders in the light of Japan's economic problems and the need to ensure that aid was used "as effectively as possible".

Syed Hamid said Japan wants to continue to make its presence felt as an economic power and at the same time look at East Asian countries, including Asean and other regions, as its important partners.

"They not only want to do things together but also act together in order to bring prosperity to the region," he said.

Describing the meeting between the two leaders as productive, Syed Hamid said they also discussed bilateral, regional as well as international issues of concern to both countries.

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