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Malaysian looking at more students going to Japan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysia has proposed an increase in students participating in educational programmes in Japan under the Look East Policy which turns 20 this year.

It also wants to revive the Japanese language programme for Malaysian teachers which was discontinued in 1998 due to financial constraints.

Japanese Ambassador to Malaysia Masaki Konishi said the proposals were made at a meeting of senior officials of both countries on Monday to chart the future direction of the policy.

He said Malaysia wanted to expand the scope of existing programmes under the policy.

Konishi said the proposal to send more students to Japan would be carefully studied despite the downturn in the Japanese economy.

"We would like to sincerely examine how we can help meet the requests made," Konishi, who headed the Japanese delegation, told the New Straits Times.

The Malaysian delegation, headed by Public Service Department director-general Datuk Seri Jamaluddin Ahmad Damanhuri, included representatives from the Prime Minister's department and Foreign and Education Ministries.

Konishi said Japan would, in due course, make counter proposals on the Malaysian requests.

He said the meeting also discussed activities to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the policy.

"We discussed various possibilities with some events to be held here and some in Malaysia."

He said he supported the move to revive the Japanese language programme for local teachers as there was a shortage of such teachers in Malaysia.

"We want to make the programme a self-sustaining one which can help turn out more Japanese language teachers to meet the need in Malaysia," he said.

Under the programme, prospective teachers spend a year at the International Students Institute in Tokyo after a five-month intensive Japanese language course at the Mara University of Technology.

The Look East policy, initiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1982, involves sending students to tertiary institutions in Japan besides workers for training at Japanese industrial sites and training institutes.

The programme, originally funded by Malaysia with Japan sharing costs, were absorbed under Yen loans after the economic crisis in 1997.

Until last year, nearly 13,000 students and trainees had been sent to Japan under the programme.

Other aspects of the policy include a technical aid programme, short-term training for Malaysian executives and a business management training and attachment programme with Japanese companies.

On Dr Mahathir's request to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for the setting up of a Japanese university in Malaysia, he said a Japanese governmental delegation would be arriving in April to discuss the matter.

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