

25/09/2002

Malaysia to continue to sponsor students to US

MIRI, Tues. - Malaysia will continue to sponsor its students to study in the United States despite increasing pressure to do otherwise following the US Government's refusal to issue visas to more than 150 US-bound Malaysian students recently.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin said the Government had not decided whether to stop sending students to the US, but sponsored students had options to study elsewhere.

"We have many alternatives. Our students can study in Australia, New Zealand, Ukraine, China and even Russia."

He was opening an International Conference on Higher Education, organised by Sarawak Development Institute and Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak.

The three-day conference organised in conjunction with the university's official opening yesterday, has attracted some 150 academicians from more than 20 countries.

Aziz said the Government would do its best to help the affected students get their visas to the US so they could complete their study there.

He said there was no plan for the Government to ask the affected students, who were mainly Muslim, to continue their studies in local universities.

"We have not identified any local universities for them to continue their studies," he said.

Last Tuesday, Aziz said more than 150 Malaysian students who returned home from the US during their semester break could not continue their studies after the US Government refused to issue them visas.

Following this development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia would look for alternatives if the US Government did not change its policy towards Malaysian students.

Aziz said the Government was also monitoring the activities of local university students due to suspicion that some might be members of the Jemaah Islamiah movement.

"We are monitoring the situation," he said, adding that it was still too early to confirm whether any local university students were involved with the movement believed to have strong links with the al-Qaeda group.

Yesterday, at least 12 members of the JI fled from Singapore after the Government tightened security on them in the past few days. They are believed to be in hiding in several locations in Southeast Asia.