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PMs agree East Asian nations should be more cohesive

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PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Malaysia and Japan today held a fruitful discussion on a variety of bilateral, regional and international issues ranging from economic co-operation to education, the East Asian economy and global peace.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi, in their discussions, agreed that East Asian countries should be more cohesive and unified to enable the region to play a role in the mainstream of the global economy.

Koizumi, who led an 80-member delegation, arrived this afternoon from the Philippines for a two-day official visit on the second leg of his five Asean-member nation tour.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who briefed the media on the meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, said Dr Mahathir and Koizumi agreed it was important to revitalise both the Japanese economy and that of countries in this region to ensure East Asia remained a competitive trading zone.

"Both leaders agreed the world had changed and new approaches are necessary to take part in trade and investment.

"For us to have a role in the world trade, our economy must be strong," he said, noting that there was growing need for East Asian countries to be a cohesive and unified force with Europe moving to single currency, and the United States become a beneficiary of Afta (the Asean Free Trade Area).

"Japan has always considered itself a friend of Asean and a good friend of Malaysia, and it will continue to play a role in Asean while it remains as an economic power.

"It is clear Japan wants its presence felt as an economic power and at the same time, look at East Asia and other regions as economic partners.

"Both of them talked about mutuality in terms of working together to bring prosperity to the region".

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir and Koizumi also shared a common stand to fight against terrorism by stressing on the need to achieve a global peace process by bringing the dispute over Palestine to an end.

"Japan believes that the question of Palestine needs to be resolved to bring peace and minimise the possibility of dissatisfaction and injustices that might prompt people to commit the act of terrorism.

"Both of them agreed that it was important to look at root causes of terrorism to find a long term solution," he added.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had also offered itself as a venue for an Asean-Japan University which will capitalise on unemployed Japanese skilled manpower to provide technical and human resource training to people from the Asean region and other parts of the world.

A success symbol of Malaysia's Look East Policy implemented by Dr Mahathir in 1981, the university is expected to further strengthen cooperation in the areas of technical cooperation and information technology between Malaysia and Japan.

He said Malaysia was very keen with the idea as it had become increasingly costly to send Malaysian students to Japan for skills training.

"As we have about 1,000 students undergoing various courses at Japanese universities, it will be more cost-effective if such courses can be

conducted in countries like Malaysia.

"For Japan, it will also be cheaper in terms of providing the necessary manpower and also in reducing the cost for its training assistance to be reached by people in other countries".

The Asean-Japan University was proposed by Dr Mahathir at the Asean Summit in Brunei Darussalam, which was also attended by Koizumi, last year.

At a separate briefing at the Nikko Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Norio Hattori, the spokesman for the Japanese Premier, said Tokyo was exploring the possibility of funding a water supply infrastructure project under its Overseas Development Aid (ODA) programme despite a cut in its 2002 budget.

He said Koizumi had given instructions for the study as the project would help resolve environmental related issues.

Besides, he said, Dr Mahathir had expressed his personal interest in the project.

It was reported in March 2000 that Malaysia would receive a total of RM4.18 billion in loans for three projects under the ODA including the Kenyir Hydro-Electric Power plant expansion project in Terengganu.

Later, Koizumi also had an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail at Istana Negara before meeting with members of the Malaysian alumni of Japanese institutions and accepting a courtesy call from the United Nations Special Envoy to Myanmar Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

He later proceeded to attend an official dinner hosted by Dr Mahathir.  
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