

15-year pact delay annoys Germany

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KUALA LUMPUR: Germany, which is getting impatient over the 15-year delay of a cultural agreement with Malaysia, wants Wisma Putra to step in and pave the way forward.

Disagreements and counter-proposals from both sides had put off the signing of the German-Malaysian Cultural Agreement, aimed at formalising bilateral co-operation in culture, arts, human resource development, education and vocational training.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had, during their bilateral meeting in Berlin in March last year, directed their officials to get the treaty signed by Sept 30 last year.

The deadline passed and during Schroeder's reciprocal visit in May, both leaders wanted the agreement renegotiated but set no time limit.

German Ambassador to Malaysia Juergen A.R. Staks said the agreement was almost clinched in 2001 but Malaysian officials wanted several amendments to the German-proposed draft.

"The German side was prepared to compromise by dropping three points from the 2001 draft agreement, but since then there has been no movement. We have to start negotiations all over again.

"Germany has cultural agreements with many other countries and is very interested to have a similar understanding with Malaysia, and we hope that Wisma Putra can help," he said in an interview before leaving for Berlin recently.

One of the hitches has been Malaysia's request for tourism co-

operation to be included in the agreement, which Germany disagreed on the grounds that tourism did not come within the purview of cultural affairs in the republic.

Culture, which has a wide scope in Germany, is a sovereign matter for each of its 16 states while in Malaysia three ministries have to strike a consensus on the terms.

Education is a key component of the cultural agreement proposed by Germany. "We do not want three separate agreements with Malaysia where culture is concerned. We hope that the ministries' concerned here can contribute to having a single agreement," Staks said.

Staks, who will brief the German Foreign Office in Berlin on the "cultural stalemate," reminded that many parties, especially educational institutions in both countries, were waiting for the cultural treaty to be signed for bilateral arrangements to gain credence.