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'INSPIRED BY DR M'S REQUEST'

First-ever Japan varsity branch abroad?

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KUALA LUMPUR: The first-ever overseas branch campus of a Japanese university is highly likely to be set up in Malaysia, Japanese ambassador to Malaysia Dr Makio Miyagawa disclosed yesterday.

He said as a policy, Japanese universities had never established overseas branch campuses, but Japan's Education Ministry recently changed the policy, inspired by a request from Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Our Education Ministry decided to meet the request from Dr Mahathir and has already amended its regulations to allow Japanese universities to seek establishment overseas," he said in an interview.

Dr Miyagawa said the ministry had approached various Japanese universities and the response had been fairly positive, with the most positive from Tsukuba University.

"There are a couple of others, but Tsukuba University is now standing in the front row. The state-owned university is one of Japan's oldest and it expanded its horizon to cover most of the research areas inside Japan,

which has also produced Nobel Prize laureates," he added.

Dr Miyagawa said one issue that had to be tackled concerned the university's status as an institution run with substantial subsidies by the government.

"The Japanese government has been consistently maintaining the policy of running the state-owned universities with reasonable fees so as to offer equal opportunities to both rich and poor families to choose the best for their students.

"So the problems we face is that although Tsukuba University is eager to set up a branch campus in Malaysia, it needs a reasonable offer from the Malaysian private or public sector for the compound, buildings and the in-house facilities, at least in the early years."

He said this would require collaboration with the Malaysian government, and he sought to do this to realise Dr Mahathir's request.

Dr Miyagawa said when Dr Mahathir visited Japan in June, he spoke of plans to resuscitate the Look East Policy he had initiated when he was prime minister in the 1980s.

Dr Mahathir had said he might see a stronger demand in

Malaysia among youth to study in Japanese higher education institutions and this would be very costly.

So an idea occurred to him that, while increasing the number of students sent to Japan under the Look East Policy, Malaysia could reduce the costs by inviting Japanese universities to set up branch cam-

puses in Malaysia.

Dr Miyagawa said under the Look East Policy, at least 16,000 Malaysians had studied in Japan with scholarships from the Malaysian government, but there were far more Malaysian students who had studied in Japan on their own budget as well.

Bernama



Dr Makio Miyagawa