

JAPANESE UNIVERSITY BRANCH TO OPEN SOON

University of Tsukuba campus to open either in Selangor or Kedah, says PM



SYED UMAR ARIFF

FUKUOKA

MALAYSIA will be the first country to have a Japanese university branch, with plans to

build the campus in either Selangor or Kedah.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said a study on the matter had been carried out for a year, and the University of Tsukuba had come out with the "most serious offer", which would likely materialise next year.

He said Malaysia was home to branch campuses from Australia, the United States, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom and China.

"Malaysia is going to be the first country to have a Japanese university campus. Several universities made offers, but the most serious one is Tsukuba. We hope we can begin (the construction) by next year

"They (Tsukuba) examined six places and narrowed down the choices to two. One in Kedah and the other in Selangor. We find that Japanese education inculcates a culture of success into students. But to send our students there will be too costly.

"If we bring the university to Malaysia, then we can benefit

those from poor countries to come to Malaysia and study," Dr Mahathir said at the wrap-up of his two-day working visit here.

He said Japan never intended to open branch campuses overseas likely due to its fiscal policies.

"For example, Australia allows its universities to set up branch campuses overseas, like Monash University. If they (the Japanese) want to venture overseas, they need to know the finances involved.

"Usually, the study fee is cheaper overseas. It is not enough to support its expenditure. The cost to study here could be one-third (of the original fee)."

He hoped the university branch would employ Japanese academic staff and offer twinning programmes, where students would be sent to study in Japan for two years as part of their courses.

On his visit, Dr Mahathir said his Japanese counterpart, Shinzo Abe, saw it as an opportunity to discuss the country's role in assisting Malaysia's development. Earlier, he received a courtesy call from Abe's special adviser, Dr Hiroto Izumi.

Izumi, who looks into Malaysia-Japan matters, touched on the development of bilateral ties between the two countries, particularly on the economy and physical progress.

"He (Abe) sent his principal adviser with nine experts from various fields. We had discussions and I gave my opinions on finances, debts, official development assistance, high-speed rail, education and more. They were serious in wanting to help us."

Dr Mahathir denied claims that the procurement of Samurai bonds had put Malaysia in a "dilemma" concerning matters related to the Lynas rare earth plant in Pahang, following claims that Japan would be the largest importer of such products.

Dr Mahathir said the Lynas plant would not be closed after experts found that rare earth waste contained only "very low-level" radioactivity and at the

same time, to retain a huge foreign direct investment.

"We are the ones who invited them to invest in us. They have put more than RM1 billion (in investment). But there were claims that the waste is highly radioactive.

"We sent experts to look into it and they found that the waste contained a very low level of radioactivity. They did not say that it's dangerous, but there are those who could not accept expert findings.

"Why would we reject their findings if we are the ones who asked them to look into it in the first place? I believe most types of soil have a bit of radioactivity in them. We cannot just chase them out. We were the ones who invited them. What will investors say about us? No, we cannot do that."

On non-governmental organisations' call for Dr Mahathir to specify the date for a transition of power as prime minister to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the former said prolonged talk on the matter would create instability and uncertainty.

"We talked about this too many times. There will be a transition. But if we talk too much about it, there will be uncertainties. When I stepped down previously, my successor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and later Datuk Seri Najib Razak changed many of the policies that had given us our success. Of course, if we continue to talk again about transition, there will be uneasiness.

"But I do not think Anwar will change the policies. He did not say he will not change them, but he also said he supports them. There shouldn't be a sense of uncertainty."