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Australian Malaysian Institute To Expand Student Exchange Programme

By Dya Singh

MELBOURNE, Aug 23 (Bernama) -- The Australian Malaysian Institute (AMI), which was set up by the Australian government in 2005 to support and help strengthen ties between Malaysians and Australians, is to expand a student exchange programme now covering only Melbourne.

Professor Lance Twomey, chairman of AMI, said the programme would be expanded nationwide as the AMI board was impressed with the success of the exchange programme.

Six schools here had selected about 30 secondary students to spend two weeks with families and schools of pen-pals in Malaysia, he told Bernama during a recent meeting between AMI and representatives of Malaysian students' organisations in Australia, at the Department of Foreign Affairs here.

The meeting between AMI and the student representatives took place following increased awareness among Australian student support organisations and government departments on giving greater attention to foreign students' welfare and other needs after the frequent attacks here on foreign students, mainly from India, in the last three months.

The meeting was part of the AMI board meeting in Melbourne over two days mainly to meet recipients of its funding programmes and to discuss applications for funding from various bodies working on Australian-Malaysian projects.

Although AMI was mainly involved in supporting projects to facilitate better ties between the two countries, it was considered important to invite Malaysian student representatives so that the AMI board could receive first hand knowledge of the needs and views of Malaysian students in Australia, said Twomey.

The Malaysian Students Council of Australia (MASCA) and the Australian Umno Club in Melbourne sent representatives to the meeting.

The Umno club chairman, Mohd Izhar Moslim, said he was happy that their views and ideas were heard by interested parties and was optimistic that something good would come out of the meeting.

The meeting was also told of the lack of assistance and information on cultural norms in Australia, which were totally different from Malaysia's.

There was also a suggestion that a short course be made available on diction, especially on clear and slow speech, not only for incoming students but Australian lecturers as well.

There were also complaints of the limited availability of training placements in industry for foreign students in line with the courses that they were studying.

Prof Twomey said their views would be channelled to the Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs.

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