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Mahathir-Arrival

DR MAHATHIR ARRIVES IN JAPAN FOR OFFICIAL VISIT

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

TOKYO, March 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived here today for a four-day official visit to Japan which officials say marks the beginning of a new relationship between Kuala Lumpur and Tokyo.

A cool and crisp early spring evening embraced Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali as they stepped off their aircraft at Haneda airport.

This is Dr Mahathir's second official visit to Japan in 14 years. Although he has been coming here almost every year, the visits were either private or working trips.

Dr Mahathir is accompanied by an official entourage which includes International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Also accompanying the prime minister is a 32-member business delegation.

Officials said ties between Malaysia and Japan have matured from a recipient-donor relationship in the seventies and early eighties to more of a partnership now.

Dr Mahathir's visit is expected to give this new relationship a boost with new areas of cooperation explored and identified.

Officials said apart from the ongoing trade deficit issue and the need for speedier transfer of technology by Japanese companies, there are no contentious issues between the two countries.

The Prime Minister will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Akasaka Guest Palace tomorrow morning followed by an audience with Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace.

He will have talks with his Japanese counterpart Ryutaro Hashimoto in the evening after which he will attend the customary state banquet at the Prime Minister's residence.

Earlier in the afternoon, Dr Mahathir will join a roundtable meeting between Malaysian and Japanese businessmen during which he is expected to make a short speech in his role as Malaysia's No.1 supersalesman.

He will also witness the signing of a RM720 million contract between KL PRT Sdn Bhd and a consortium of three companies -- Itochu Corporation, Toyo Engineering Corporation and Hitachi Ltd -- for the supply of a monorail system.

KL PRT Sdn Bhd is undertaking the construction of a 16km long elevated inner city monorail system called PRT or People-Mover Rapid Transit in traffic-congested Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, the Japan Times, a leading English language newspaper, featured a one-and-a-half page news focus on Dr Mahathir's visit and Malaysia today.

The news focus, accompanied by a picture of a smiling Dr Mahathir and a side-bar story on Malaysia's tourist attractions, noted that Malaysia's economy has been growing strongly with its gross national product growing at a rate of 9.2 per cent in 1994, 9.5 per cent in 1995 and 8.2 per cent in 1996.

Malaysia is seen as becoming a global player, no longer a regional player, noted the article which was based on an interview with ambassador Tan Sri Muhammad Khatib Abdul Hamid.

The write-up also took note of Malaysia's efforts in setting up the Multimedia Super Corridor while in the international arena Malaysia had contributed towards peacekeeping by sending troops to Angola, Mozambique, Somali, Kuwait and Bosnia Herzegovina. -- BERNAMA

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