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Hashimoto pays tribute to Dr M's leadership and Malaysians' efforts

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto today paid tribute to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership and the never-ending efforts of the Malaysian people.

"I am most impressed with your country's phenomenal economic development and the solid political stability of Malaysia," he said at a dinner hosted by the Malaysian Prime Minister.

Hashimoto said that since Dr Mahathir advocated the "Look East" policy in 1981, co-operation between Japan and Malaysia had strengthened tremendously, particularly in the economic field.

He said in tandem with the increasing economic exchanges, political co-operation and cultural exchanges had also expanded and the close ties between the peoples of the two countries had become valuable assets for both countries.

He said with Asean celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, the economic development and political stability nurtured in these countries had been remarkable.

Hashimoto said it was increasingly important for Japan to strengthen relations with Asean.

"I firmly believe that peace and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region in the 21st century, as well as those in the world, can be achieved through close co-operation between Japan and Asean," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would continue with its "Look East" policy and hoped that Japan would make available more places in Japanese universities and training institutions for its students.

He said despite Malaysia's deliberate attempt to "look east" there were only about 2,000 students at any one time in Japan and hoped the situation would improve since there were more than 60,000 Malaysian students in Western and other countries.

He said human resource development was a significant aspect of Malaysia-Japan co-operation and Japan's support for the "Look East" policy had enabled 5,000 students and trainees to study in Japan as well as acquire practical skills.

Hashimoto arrived this morning for a two-day visit. He is on a five-nation Southeast Asian tour and arrived in Kuala Lumpur from Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei. He will also visit Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore.

On arrival at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang, the Japanese leader was received by Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Science, Technology and Environment Deputy Minister Datuk Abu Bakar Daud, who is the Minister-in-attendance.

He is accompanied by a 72-member delegation, including Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kaoru Yosano and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Shunji Yanai.

Dr Mahathir said Japanese investments continued to grow and Japan was currently Malaysia's biggest foreign investor with a total cumulative capital investment of RM25.3 billion for the period 1980 to October 1996.

He said since Malaysia was currently undergoing tremendous changes as a result of its rapid economic growth, it had launched its Second Industrial Master Plan - a blueprint to advance into the 21st century - to improve the wellbeing of the people and ensure continued growth.

"Malaysia could benefit from Japan's economic and technical superiority and welcomes Japan's co-operation to achieve our goals.

"Japanese investments, particularly in the hi-tech and capital-intensive small and medium-scale industries producing sophisticated components, would be very welcomed especially when they are in partnership with Malaysian companies.

"In particular, we look forward to the participation of Japanese IT (Information Technology) companies in our Multimedial Super Corridor.

"I hope Japan will continue to be Malaysia's partner for progress and help us attain our goal of becoming a fully developed nation by 2020," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in the relations between Japan and Malaysia, the private sector had played a very significant role with constant dialogues between them and he hoped that their collaboration would continue and be expanded to third countries.

"The support of the Japanese Government in these endeavours would certainly prove beneficial not just to Japan and Malaysia but also to the third countries concerned," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was following with considerable interest the Japanese Government's determined efforts to pursue administrative reforms and added:

"Just as we have been fairly successful, I am sure you will be able to achieve your goals."

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