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LEAD Mahathir-Visit

MALAYSIA TO STEP UP DIRECT BUSINESS LINKS WITH JAPANESE PREFECTURES

By: Zainoor Sulaiman

TOYAMA (Japan), July 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia will further promote direct business links with Japanese prefectures.

He said he would like to see more direct contacts and business engagements between the Malaysian private sector and their Japanese counterparts in the prefectures.

In the past, such contacts and collaboration were only conducted with those at national level in Tokyo, he said in a brief speech at a lunch hosted by Toyama governor Yutaka Nakaoki, here.

Present were the Malaysian ambassador to Japan, Tan Sri Mohamad Khatib Abdul Hamid, and local political and business leaders.

Dr Mahathir said every prefecture in Japan was bigger than the whole of Malaysia, in terms of population and business activities.

The prime minister, who is on a seven-day holiday-cum-working visit to Japan, flew here this morning to look into the Japanese motorcar industry and a hill resort railway service.

Soon upon arrival the prime minister and his entourage, which included his sons Mirzan and Mokhzani, were taken on a tour of the Matsuoka car plant which specialises in producing classical and antique models using Nissan and Mazda car engines. Present was the Perodua managing director, Datuk Abdul Rahman Omar.

The company's president Susumu Matsuoka briefed Dr Mahathir on the operations of his company which was established in 1968.

The plant, which employs about 100 workers, produces 10 units of such cars a month with the price ranging from 1.5 million Yen (US\$30,000) to 3.5 million Yen (US\$70,000)

Dr Mahathir later visited Kurobe Kyokoku Railway Ltd which runs the 20km hill railroad which covers 46 tunnels and 27 bridges. The company was incorporated in 1971 but the track was built in 1924 together with the construction of the Yanagawa hydro-electric power plant on the upstream of the Kurobe river.

Dr Mahathir later and took a train ride on a half-hour scenic journey on the steep hillslope from Kuronagi to Unazuki along the Kurobe River.

Tomorrow, he is scheduled to meet Okayama governor Masahiro Ishii and local political and business leaders.

On Monday he will hold a dialogue with selected business, academic and political leaders.

He will return to Kuala Lumpur on July 22, ending his two-month "holiday" abroad during which he made official and working visits to several countries including Britain, Lebanon, Turkey, Hungary, France and Japan. -- BERNAMA

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