

24 MAR 1997

Khatib-Japan

M'SIA-JAPAN RELATIONS POISED TO ENTER NEW PLANE

By: Syed Jamil Jaafar

TOKYO, March 24 (Bernama) -- Relations between Malaysia and Japan are set to enter a new phase and reach a higher level following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's four-day official visit beginning tomorrow, Malaysian ambassador Tan Sri Muhammad Khatib Abdul Hamid said today.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, is scheduled to arrive here tomorrow evening for his second official visit to Japan since 1983. Although Dr Mahathir has made numerous trips to Japan, the last being in January to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), they were unofficial or working visits.

Briefing Malaysian journalists, Khatib said Dr Mahathir is coming to Japan this time as the leader of a successful country seeking to explore new avenues of cooperation on the basis of partnership.

"The situation today is so much different from the 1983 visit when we were seeking development assistance, investments in labour intensive projects and had just launched the Look East policy," Khatib said.

"Now we are more selective in seeking foreign investment, giving priority to capital intensive, high technology and heavy industries. Since 1993 we have also stopped taking yen loan assistance."

"We still have the Look East policy but now are looking at enhancing the content. For example, we want to send more students for post-graduate studies."

He said the Japanese no longer looked upon Malaysia as a "receiving" country but as a successful nation to be regarded as a partner.

"In other words, the relationship has matured," Khatib said.

Malaysia's entry into the field of information technology and its high profile in international affairs were admired by various sectors in Japan, said Khatib who has been Malaysia's envoy in Tokyo for the past eight years.

Dr Mahathir will have an audience with Emperor Akihito at Akasaka Palace on Wednesday followed by official talks with his counterpart Ryutaro Hashimoto in the afternoon.

The Prime Minister will also visit Osaka to meet top Japanese industrialists and Fukuoka where he will address the Second Fukuoka Dialogue. He will focus on multimedia.

Dr Mahathir will leave for home on Saturday from Nagoya after witnessing the naming of a ship belonging to Konsortium Perkapalan by Dr Siti Hasmah. -- BERNAMA

SJ RM