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PM arrives in Tokyo for second official visit

Azmi M. Anshar in Tokyo

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad arrived in Tokyo yesterday for his second official visit to Japan, with a tight schedule spanning four Japanese cities in four days and his first audience with Emperor Akihito.

Fourteen years have lapsed since the last time Dr Mahathir made an official visit in 1983.

Japan was then under the reign of the late Emperor Hirohito, in a very different political environment led by the then Prime Minister Yushihiro Nakasone, whom Dr Mahathir is expected to meet during breakfast tomorrow.

Flying in the executive jet with his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, they were greeted on arrival at the Haneda Airport by Japanese Ambassador to Malaysia Kazunari Nomura, Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry's Chief of Protocol Kunisada Kume and director-general of Asian Affairs Bureau Kato Ryoza.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Akasaka Guest Palace in downtown Tokyo tomorrow morning. It will synchronise with the start of the Diet, the Japanese Parliament, at 8.20am Malaysian time.

After the welcoming ceremony, the Prime Minister will have an audience with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko at the Imperial palace.

Dr Mahathir will also witness a signing ceremony between KL PRT Sdn Bhd, the company behind the People's Rapid Transit and Itochu Corp, Hitachi Ltd and Toyo Engineering Co Ltd.

The primary business of Dr Mahathir's visit gets underway in the evening with an official meeting dubbed as the Roundtable Meeting with his counterpart, Ryutaro Hashimoto, at the Japanese Prime Minister's official residence.

The two leaders are expected to thrash out the chief agenda - Hashimoto's proposal of regular summits between Japan and Asean nations.

Later that night, Hashimoto will host a State banquet in Dr Mahathir's honour.

After his private meeting with Nakasone tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will address students of the Waseda University with his perspective called Future of Asia and the Role of Japan: Challenges of the 21st Century to Youth.

Dr Mahathir will also attend a joint luncheon hosted by the Japanese Economic Organisations which he will address briefly before departing for Osaka.

That night, he will attend a private dinner hosted by Tan Sri Masaharu Matsushita, chairman of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co Ltd.

On Friday, Dr Mahathir will visit the Osaka Business Park to observe a technical exhibition organised by the Matsushita company.

In the late afternoon, Dr Mahathir will attend the Fukuoka Dialogue and deliver a keynote address to an audience of political and business people.

On Saturday afternoon, the Prime Minister will leave for Nagoya to attend his last function at the NKK Tsu Works wharf. There Dr Siti Hasmah will launch a new vessel commissioned by Konsortium Perkapalan.

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