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Anwar to meet Japan's CEOs, investors

Fauziah Ismail in Tokyo

TOKYO, Sun: Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is scheduled to meet the heads of leading corporations as well as institutional investors during his four-day stay in Japan which begins today.

Anwar's working visit here has been seen by analysts as part of efforts to woo Japanese investors back to the region, with reports out of Tokyo saying despite the sharp rebound in most of South-East Asia's ravaged stock markets in recent days, Japanese investors have remained reluctant to re-commit themselves.

One reason for this is believed to be uncertainty over corporate profits for fiscal 1997 although Japanese institutional investors generally expect the markets to continue to stabilise as long as economic reforms are pushed through and defaults on foreign debts avoided.

Anwar is scheduled to meet the heads of Toyota Motor Corp, Itochu Corp, OISCA International, Nomura Asset Management Co Ltd, IBJ Securities Co Ltd, Mitsui Mutual Life Insurance Co, Daiwa International Capital Management Co Ltd and Nikko Securities Co Ltd in separate meetings tomorrow and Tuesday.

In an interview with a foreign wire service last week, Anwar said his visit was aimed at persuading "Japan to play a bigger role to help ailing economies in the region."

In this regard, Anwar, who will also meet Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto tomorrow, will discuss with Japanese officials issues relating to measures undertaken as well as planned by countries in the region.

This include the use of own currencies in regional trade, a proposal made by the Asean-9 during its informal summit in Kuala Lumpur last December, and which was the main topic of discussions Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad held with Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, Philippine President Fidel Ramos and Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong last week.

It is understood that China, Japan and South Korea - represented at the summit by President Jiang Zemin, Hashimoto and Prime Minister Koh Kun - did not object to the idea at their respective meetings with the grouping.

Asean had also called for a study on the possibility of using alternative currencies, apart from the US dollar, for international trading.

Malaysia's Padi Beras Nasional Bhd (Bernas), the custodian of the country's rice industry, has proved that trade transactions in own currencies is not only workable but also offers the prospect of immediate returns.

Bernas, which decided to enter into arrangements with its trading partners to use their respective currencies instead of the US dollar last September, has already chalked up about RM8.4 million in foreign exchange savings from such deals.

Reports quoting Japanese diplomats said Tokyo hopes to convey to Anwar the need to continue to send Malaysian students to Japan under the "Look East" policy launched by Dr Mahathir in 1981.

As of March last year, there were 1,730 students in Japanese universities, 372 of whom are sponsored by the Malaysian Government, 287 by the Japanese Government and 1,071 by the private sector.

Tonight, Anwar will attend a working dinner hosted by Nihon Keizai Shimbun Ltd. Guests include Professor Masahiro Kawai of the University of Tokyo, Japan Economic Planning Agency director Mitsuru Tanluchi and A.T. Kearney special adviser for Asia Toshihiko Kinoshita.

The tightly-packed schedule continues tomorrow with meetings with Hashimoto and Japanese Vice Minister for International Financial Affairs Eisuke Sakakibara, and a luncheon talk by Liberal Democratic Party secretary-general Koichi Kato.

In the evening, Anwar will deliver a keynote address at the Global ThinkNet Tokyo seminar and attend a dinner hosted by Japanese Finance Minister Hikaru Matsunaga.

On Tuesday, Anwar will meet Diet members over breakfast and later with officials of the Japanese Institute for International Monetary Affairs.

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