

08/06/2000

Dr Mahathir gets down to work

Hardev Kaur in Nagoya, Japan

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who arrived in Nagoya yesterday, wasted no time and went straight to work visiting the 80-year-old Yamazaki Mazak headquarters and plant 40km from the city.

He toured the state-of-the-art plant - the world's largest producer of metal-cutting machine tools and a leader in innovative machine tool technology.

Dr Mahathir then witnessed the signing of two agreements. The first was a sales and purchase contract of machine and technical support between SME Aerospace Malaysia and Yamazaki Mazak Corporation of Japan. The contract value is about RM90 million for 10 years. The value is forecast to increase to RM200 million once SME Aerospace is ready to take on more jobs.

The second was a technical support and consultancy agreement to allow SME Aerospace optimum utilisation of the machines. Yamazaki Mazak will also provide on-line expertise to the Malaysian firm.

Tan Sri Ahmad Johan, the group managing director of SME Industries, signed for SME Aerospace while Tony Yamazaki, the executive vice-president, signed for his company.

Ahmad Johan said the machines would primarily be dedicated to fulfilling a contract expected to be signed between SME Aerospace and BAE System of Britain later this month.

BAE System is seriously considering Malaysia to produce the wing of the new RJX Regional Jet launched recently. Negotiations are in the final stages and the BAE team is expected to be in Kuala Lumpur at the end of the month to finalise the agreement.

"The job will not only give Malaysia the benefit but more importantly, will propel Malaysia to be the top aerospace company in South East Asia," Ahmad Johan said.

A Yamazaki Mazak company official speaking at the signing ceremony, said Malaysia was set to become a world player in the aircraft industry.

Yamazaki Mazak Corporation, founded in March 1919, is a world leader in computerised numeric control (CNC) systems which include laser, robotics and flexible manufacturing systems. It has operations in North, Central and South America, Europe and in Southeast Asia.

Dr Mahathir leaves for Tokyo today by train. During the week-long working visit to Japan, Dr Mahathir will attend the funeral of the late Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi in Tokyo. He will also address the Nikkei International Conference on the "Future of Asia - Asia's Resurgence: Challenges for the New Millennium".

Others attending the conference, held annually for the last five years, include Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid and Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to call on the new Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and hold bilateral discussions with Abdurrahman.

This will be the first meeting between Dr Mahathir and Mori since the latter took over from Obuchi.

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