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JAPAN-MAHATHIR

DR MAHATHIR HOPES KOIZUMI WILL HAVE A LONGER TERM IN OFFICE

KUALA LUMPUR, July 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hopes his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi would stay longer as a prime minister to ensure the success of his new structural reforms.

Dr Mahathir conveyed his hope to visiting Japanese minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy, Dr Heizo Takenaka who called on the prime minister at his office here today.

In the meeting, Dr Takenaka said Dr Mahathir wanted Koizumi to continue to serve as prime minister for a longer time probably four to five years.

Japan seems to have new prime minister almost every year, he told a reporters after his meeting with the prime minister today.

"Dr Mahathir told me he wants to see the success of his reform and and that he appreciated Koizumi's efforts," he added.

Dr Takenaka said Japan would have the chance to see the changes following Koizumi's structural reform policies.

He said Koizumi was widely regarded as one who was frank, outspoken and forward looking with a strong political base.

"Close to 90 percent of Japanese people now support him and his policies. and this reflects strongly on his ability and popularity," he said.

Dr Takanaka also said that Koizumi would have a strong government machinery to support him in his drive to introduce sound reform policies.

On Japan's economic outlook, Dr Takenaka said Japan was not expected to see serious negative GDP growth this year.

Touching on the Japanese yen performance, he said it was difficult to predict the level as structural reform might initiate a downward trend on the currency.

However, he said, the government was prepared to take proactive measures to offset any downward trend on the yen.

Takenaka said that his proposal to have an information technology (IT) summit meeting for Asean countries was met favourably by Dr Mahathir and Singapore's prime minister, Goh Chok Tong.

Takenaka is a cabinet minister and a well-known professor in economics at Keio University in Japan. -- BERNAMA

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