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MAHATHIR-JAPAN

JAPAN KEEN TO HAVE CLOSE RELATIONS WITH MYANMAR, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Mohd Kamel Othman

QING DAO, (China) Oct 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Japan is keen to have a closer relationship with Myanmar.

The Prime Minister said this was indicated by his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi during a bilateral meeting in Shanghai earlier today.

They were among world leaders present in Shanghai to attend the ninth economic leaders meeting under the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which ended yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said Koizumi had also wanted to know about the relationship between Malaysia and Myanmar.

"I told him about the conditions in Myanmar and why the process of democratic recovery will take time," he told Malaysian reporters at a press conference here today.

Myanmar is a member of Asean. Other members are Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore.

The Prime Minister is in Qing Dao, a city located north of China, for a one-day working visit.

Qing Dao is about an hour's flight from Shanghai.

Dr Mahathir will depart for Cheju Island, South Korea tomorrow morning.

The prime minister said that Koizumi expressed his disappointment as he had yet to visit Malaysia, but said he would do so as soon as possible.

Asked to comment further on the meeting, Dr Mahathir said Koizumi wanted to know Malaysia's stand as an Islamic nation in relation to terrorism and the latest developments in the country.

"He understands our stand concerning Afghanistan," he said.

The Japanese Prime Minister was also keen to know about the arrests of several people in Malaysia believed to be involved in militant activities.

"He asked whether we had proof and I explained that we have sufficient proof," Dr Mahathir said.

As to the economic recovery following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Dr Mahathir said that his counterpart was confident of turning round the Japanese economy through a planned approach.

"We hope that the efforts succeed as a major factor causing the recession was the recession in the US," he said.

Concerning the effects on the global economy, Dr Mahathir said all parties including the US agreed that it has jolted the confidence of the international community.

Dr Mahathir said that the confidence of the international community was affected as they no longer want to travel and when air travel is affected, many related industries are similarly affected.

"Airlines, the hotel and service industries will suffer. Many industries will feel the pinch given the contraction in the airline and tourism industry," he said.

The Prime Minister said that the travel industry is the biggest contributor to an economy.

Last year, Malaysia chalked up RM17 billion from the industry and the amount is expected to increase this year, but currently, there was a decrease in the number of travellers. -- BERNAMA

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