

21/01/2001

Malaysia keen on Japanese SMIs

Syed Nadzri in Osaka

MALAYSIA is keen to be home to small-scale industries from Japan which are facing difficulty in finding people to run them, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said there were at least 10 to 20 of the more than 5,500 of such family-run businesses around the Tokyo area that were suitable to be relocated to Malaysia.

These industries, mainly backyard operations employing a small number of people, are not doomed economically but many of them cannot carry on as the owners' children are just not interested in taking over the businesses.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to Malaysian journalists after recording a interview at the Kansai Telecasting Corporation in Osaka yesterday.

He was asked to elaborate on his observations and interest on Japanese backyard industries and whether it was possible for some of them to be relocated to Malaysia.

"Most of the industries are run by individuals with two or three workers. Now they are facing problems because their children are not keen to take over although the businesses are still in good shape. If the children are not interested, I think the industries could be relocated to Malaysia."

The Prime Minister said these were mainly support industries.

"They do not make products for the end-user but supply components to bigger industries. We already have a vendor system of industry in Malaysia providing supplies to Proton.

"Perhaps we could expand on this and have small industries to make components for the electronics and aviation sector."

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether it was wise for Malaysia to continue to copy Japan now that Japan was showing signs of failing.

He said Malaysia did not have to ape the way Japan was now copying the West.

"But there are many other aspects of the Japanese system from which we could pick up. For instance, one of the students pointed out in my dialogue with them (on Friday) that Malaysian shopkeepers do not treat customers like the Japanese do - polite, ever-smiling and helpful. This is one aspect we can copy.

"There are others, of course - cleanliness, discipline and methods of bringing up children. This we can follow. Not the economic system which the Japanese copy from the West."

On the outcome of his visit to Japan, Dr Mahathir said the main purpose of the trip was to participate in the economic symposium organised by Mainichi Shimbun and attend a reception to commemorate the publishing of his book A Message to Japan on Thursday.

But at the same time, he said, he took the opportunity to visit the Sharp liquid crystal plant and the Electro-Communication College, a multimedia institute.

He said although he did not discuss specific projects with Sharp, the company had indicated that it would step up its operations in Malaysia, now comprising four factories.

Dr Mahathir said interests had also been shown for Malaysia Airlines to add another Japanese destination in the Okayama Prefecture.

He said in his discussions with Japanese officials, there were

suggestions that Japan and some other countries in the region start an aerospace venture to build medium-range passenger aircraft.

He said this was something that could be looked into because air travel would be big business in future. He added that the manufacture of aircraft was now dominated by two giant companies - Boeing of the United States and Airbus Industries of Europe.

Dr Mahathir leaves for home today.

(END)