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PM a celebrated author in Japan

Syed Nadzri in Osaka

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, revered in Japan as an outspoken Prime Minister, is now becoming a celebrated author as well in this country.

Barely two years after his book A New Deal for Asia was translated and published in Japanese, A Message to Japan has now hit the stands.

This book, a Japanese-version of Reflections on Asia that was published by Millenium Books in Malaysia last year, is a collection of monthly articles by him in the Mainichi Daily News of Japan between February 1999 and June last year.

These articles were also translated into English and published by the New Straits Times during the period.

The stories were written when Asia was on the road to recovery from the currency crisis that hit most of the economies in the region in 1997.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a four-day visit to Osaka, attended a reception at the Osaka Rihga Royal Hotel yesterday to commemorate the publishing of the book.

And what a reception it was because the adulations were endless for the Prime Minister in the speeches at the function.

The book contains 18 chapters including "Small Countries v Gigantic Powers", "My Thoughts on East Timor", "The World of Islam", "The Malaysian Way" and the "Umno Saga".

A central figure in making the book a reality is Akiko Kato, Mainichi's Hong Kong Bureau Chief, who, it is said, had to shuttle between Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur every month in 1999 and last year to ensure Dr Mahathir did not miss his contribution.

Of course, Akiko had to deal with a lot of red ink marks when the drafts of the stories got back to her from the Prime Minister's office, it was narrated during the reception.

Dr Mahathir's visit enters its second day today with a visit to the Sharp Liquid Crystal Plant in Nara Prefecture, the Osaka Electro-Communication College and, at dinner time, a dialogue with Malaysian students.

Bernama reports that Dr Mahathir, who arrived here today for a four-day working visit, was accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

The Prime Minister was met at the Kansai International Airport by Malaysia's ambassador to Japan Datuk Marzuki Mohammad Noor and other embassy officials.

Hours after arrival, Dr Mahathir delivered a keynote address at the Mainichi International Symposium, the first part of the "Wake Up Kansai" campaign aimed at reviving the sluggish economy in the Kansai region.

He spoke on the theme "Promoting Mutual Understanding Between Asia and Japan, especially Kansai," at the Osaka International Centre and later joined Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, South Korean Ambassador Choi Sang Yong, former director general of the Economic Planning Agency Taichi Sakaiya and NTT West Japan President Kazuo Asada for a panel discussion.

He received chairman of Kansai Economic Federation (Kankeiren), Yoshihisa Akiyama, who is also the president of the Kansai Electric Power Co. Inc.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to visit the Sharp Liquid Plant in Tenri City, Nara Prefecture and have a first hand look at Sharp's development of liquid crystal display technology.

Following that he will travel to the Osaka Electro-Communication

University which specialises in the Information Technology.

Dr Mahathir will then hold a dialogue with Malaysian students studying in the Kansai region.

On his third day here, Dr Mahathir will participate in a Fuji Television Network recording of a forum entitled "Views and ideas on the 21st Century-Future of Asia and Japan's Choice".

He is also scheduled to receive Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Takeo Hiranuma.

Hiranuma is also chairman of the Japan-Malaysia Parliamentary Friendship League and honorary chairman of the Malaysia Japan Association, a non governmental organisation comprising individuals and corporations.

Dr Mahathir leaves for home on Sunday.

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