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20 years later, Look East Policy comes under spotlight in Japan

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NEARLY 20 years after the adoption of the Look East policy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will address its relevance and direction when he speaks at two seminars in Japan.

He will also give his views on Islam and correct any misconceptions that may exist in the Japanese community when he speaks at the functions to be attended by government officials, businessmen and academics.

Dr Mahathir, who left Kuala Lumpur last night for a two-day official visit on the invitation of the Japanese Government, is accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and a delegation of senior government officials.

A tight schedule awaits Dr Mahathir who will start his visit with an audience with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko at the Imperial Palace.

Dr Mahathir will deliver a keynote address at the 20th anniversary of the Look East Policy seminar.

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister is expected to meet his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi at his office (Sori Kantei) before attending an official dinner hosted by Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi at the Iikura government guest house.

"There is much anticipation for Dr Mahathir's views and aspirations on how both Japan and Malaysia can move forward in the ambit of the Look East policy ... to ascertain where we go from here.

"Undoubtedly, both nations have gained from this policy, and the Japanese are very serious about enhancing this understanding and co-operation," Malaysian Ambassador to Japan Datuk Marzuki Mohammad Noor said.

Speaking to Malaysian reporters, Marzuki said even the Imperial Palace followed the developments in Malaysia very closely.

Among the key personnel expected to sit as panellists at the seminar are Public Service Department director-general Tan Sri Jamaluddin Damanhuri, Institute of Strategic and International Studies chairman Tan Sri Noordin Sopie, senior government officials and corporate leaders.

Tomorrow, the Prime Minister is scheduled for a breakfast meeting with Japanese corporate leaders, followed by a two-hour working visit to the Tokyo Disney Sea theme park.

"Dr Mahathir will meet the presidents and chief executive officers from leading Japanese multinationals like Mitsui Corporation, Mitsubishi, Matsushita, Daihatsu and a few others during the breakfast.

"It'll be a broad representation of the corporate sector, and the crux of the meeting will be on ways to enhance the existing economic co-operation."

At Disney Sea, near Tokyo Bay, Dr Mahathir is scheduled for a backstage briefing into the operations and technology in the theme park which is listed as "first in the world".

The technology applied in the animation and a host of other facilities in Disney Sea, has great potential commercially and as a tourist attraction.

In the afternoon, Dr Mahathir is expected to be at the United Nations University to deliver his keynote address at the symposium on "Islam: Fostering Peace and Dialogue in an Interdependent World".

It is organised by the UN University, Organisation of Islamic Conference member countries' ambassadors in Japan and the Diet committee (Committee

of Japanese Parliamentarians on Islam).

"Dr Mahathir's views are taken very seriously here and he is one of the few leaders who will deliver his keynote address and stay on to take questions from the floor.

"The organisers are busy making arrangements for closed-circuit television coverage to accommodate those on the waiting list as the hall is already full," Marzuki added.

The Prime Minister will continue on a two-day private visit to Sendai before returning home next Tuesday.

Although the visit to Sendai is private, Dr Mahathir is expected to "work" when he visits one of the largest dairy farms located there.