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Dr M: Malaysia to enter into FTA with Japan

MALAYSIA will enter into a broad-based bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Japan by next year, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said that the details of the agreement have been prepared and would be submitted to the Japanese Government soon.

"We are working on it. Japan has a FTA with Singapore and Thailand and I think that we should also have a FTA with them. But our agreement would be broad based and apart from economic it would also include other areas like culture and education.

"We have already prepared the documents, our own ideas about FTA and we will present it to the Japanese Government. Hopefully by next year we would be able to seal it."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a Press conference for the Malaysian media upon the conclusion of his two-day official visit to Japan yesterday.

He said that while the FTA tie-up with China was via Asean, a FTA agreement with Japan must be bilateral due to the differing interests of Asean members and vice-versa.

He said the matter was extensively discussed with Japanese Finance Minister Masajuro Shiokawa when the latter called on him yesterday morning.

"We also touched on the financing of infrastructure projects in Malaysia and setting up of the Technological University," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Japanese corporate leaders whom he met at a breakfast meeting yesterday morning had pledged fresh investments in niche areas of high technology and knowledge-based industries in Malaysia.

"This trip has been very useful, I met the business people particularly those who have interest in Malaysia and we have tried to convince them that it is still worthwhile to invest in Malaysia. They are quite keen, they said their experience in Malaysia is good and that they are very comfortable in Malaysia.

"Although China got certain attractions, Malaysia got its own qualities."

On his working visit to the Tokyo Disney Sea Theme Park, he said that it was an interesting concept which was only available in Japan.

Dr Mahathir wrapped up his two-day official visit with a keynote address at a symposium on Islam at the United Nations University in the afternoon and departed to Sendai (an agricultural province north of Tokyo) for a two-day private visit.

The Prime Minister and wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali left Tokyo by the Tohoku Shinkansen speed train about 6pm.

They are expected to return home from Sendai on Tuesday.