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Report on Asean, Japan partnership by October

A PANEL of senior economic officials from Asean nations and Japan are expected to submit a report by October on the economic partnership proposed by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during his ongoing visit to the region.

Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry vice-minister Katsusada Hirose said the report would be handed to economic ministers concerned by the panel established last September.

He was optimistic that discussions on the proposed partnership would proceed smoothly in months to come.

"I expect discussions to progress in a forward-looking manner following the premier's proposal," the Daily Yomiuri newspaper quoted him as saying.

Koizumi, on a week-long tour of five Asean nations, including Malaysia which he visited last Thursday, has proposed building a comprehensive economic partnership with the region.

He revealed the plan at a meeting with Philippines president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in Manila, his first stop, last Wednesday, elaborating on it in discussions with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the next day.

The Japanese Prime Minister had stated the partnership plan should be discussed by the panel to enable an agreement in future between Asean nations and Japan.

He did not, however, set a deadline for the realisation of the partnership.

The group of experts is expected to hold its first meeting later this month in Bangkok.

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