

24 MAY 2002

Mahathir-Return

PM RETURNS FROM JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

KUALA LUMPUR, May 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad returned home today from a five-day visit to Japan and South Korea that has helped strengthen ties with the two countries.

Japan and South Korea, on which Malaysia has based its Look East Policy, are among its major investors and trading partners.

Dr Mahathir, arriving on a executive jet, was received at the RMAF base in Subang here by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other dignitaries.

The visit, two days in Japan and three in South Korea, is the latest in a string overseas trips by Dr Mahathir this year. He recently returned from a trip to Washington.

One of the most notable features of the Japan and South Korean trip was the support shown by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung for the establishment of the Asean Plus Three secretariat in Malaysia.

Speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would enhance its Look East Policy involving South Korea by sending more students to the country.

He also said that he was impressed with South Korea's ability to repay the US\$56 billion loan it took from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the economic crisis.

"We must learn from South Korea how it recovered so quickly," he said.

He said South Korea had many successful industries including electronics, biotechnology and car manufacturing which was so advanced.

The prime minister, who visited the Hyundai-Kia Motor research and development centre in Hanyang, said he was impressed with the company's ability to produce 2.6 million cars a year.

"This is a very big figure for a country that has yet to be recognised as a developed country with a population of 46 million," he said.

On his visit to Japan, Dr Mahathir said he discussed with Koizumi bilateral problems, Yen loans which are currently under consideration and the proposal to establish the Asean Plus Three secretariat in Malaysia.

He also answered many questions on China while in Japan, he added.

-- BERNAMA

MAD MFJ JK