

# PM returns from week-long trip

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SEPANG: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad returned home yesterday after a week-long trip that took him to France and Japan.

Present to welcome him at the KL International Airport here were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Religious Adviser to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman and Deputy Education Minister Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsuddin.

The aircraft carrying Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali landed at 4.30pm after a six-hour journey from Tokyo's Narita International Airport.

Dr Mahathir left on May 30 to attend the Enlarged Group of Eight Summit in Evian, France, at French

President Jacques Chirac's invitation.

On the sidelines of the dialogue, he held talks with various world leaders including Russian President Vladimir Putin, South African President Thabo Mbeki and Chirac himself.

From France, he went to Japan for the Ninth Nikkei Conference, arriving there on Tuesday.

He also met his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi.

At Thursday night's dinner organised by Nikkei in conjunction with its ninth conference on Future of Asia: Genesis of a New Order, Dr Mahathir said his participation this year would be his last "and a kind of farewell" to the conference.

Dr Mahathir, 77, who became Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister in 1981, did not, however, say this would be his last visit to Japan as premier but

his last participation in the Nikkei conference, which Malaysian ambassador Datuk Marzuki Mohamed Noor said, "will not be the same without him."

Indeed, judging from the packed audience, which comprised mainly company executives and senior government officials, it was clear that the Nikkei conference was a huge success, with the Asian Leaders' Round Table for Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003: Genesis of a New Asian Order generating much interest.

For Dr Mahathir, the conference was stimulating as it enabled the leaders to discuss issues of mutual interest.

He was joined by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo of the Philippines, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto at the round table after his keynote address.