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Mahathir-Japan

ASEAN-JAPAN TRADE, SECURITY HIGH ON PM'S AGENDA

By: Salbiah Said

TOKYO, June 2 (Bernama) -- Asean-Japan trade and economic cooperation as well as regional security issues are high on the agenda of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's three-day working visit to Japan beginning tomorrow.

Malaysian ambassador to Japan Datuk Marzuki Mohamed Noor told a media briefing at the embassy here today that of importance was the Ninth Nikkei International Conference on "The Future of Asia: Genesis of a New Asian Order" on Thursday when he would share his thoughts on regional security.

Dr Mahathir is expected to deliver his keynote address for about 30 minutes at the one-day conference, before some 400 people comprising business executives, members of the private sector and senior government officials.

An Asian Leaders' Round Table for "Asean-Japan Exchange Year 2003" has been scheduled after the prime minister delivers his speech.

He will be joined by Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto.

Dr Mahathir will kick off the Round Table with Asean's perspective on regional security, giving an insight on Islamic fundamentalism in the region. He will also touch on the situation in North Korea.

The talks, to be divided into three groups, will also discuss the creation of free trade agreements (FTAs) and inter regional trade economic cooperation, to be chaired by Thaksin while the third group led by Hashimoto will focus on Japan's role in East Asia.

On Dr Mahathir's suggestion last year, the Round Table had been slotted for the first time, after the Nikkei conference, to allow leaders to articulate their views on regional matters, said Marzuki, whose term as ambassador to Japan is now in his fourth year.

Besides regional security, he said, the creation of FTAs was significant in that several countries had taken up the proposal by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to establish such agreements with Japan.

So far, Thailand and the Philippines had expressed their interest in establishing such trade pacts with Japan, he said.

Marzuki said that Malaysia was the first to take up the initiative, with the Malaysia-Japan partnership agreement, incorporating an FTA element signed last month.

The next working group meeting would meet in Malaysia next month, he said.

The Round Table meeting will be followed up with bilateral talks between Dr Mahathir and several leaders including Arroyo and Koizumi.

While in Japan, Dr Mahathir, who will be accompanied by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, will begin his working visit tomorrow with a meeting with former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who is also chairman of the think-tank, Institute for International Policy Studies (IIPS).

At the institute, Dr Mahathir will also speak on the "Asian Dimension under the New World Order -- Evolving Paradigms in Asia and Japan."

Wednesday will see Dr Mahathir being briefed on the BioValley master plan launched in Dengkil last month.

On hand to update him on the project is one of its architects, Dr Kisho Kurokawa, who is also an architect for the KL International Airport (KLIA).

On the same day, Dr Mahathir is also scheduled to hold discussions with researchers and representatives of Japanese pharmaceutical companies.

On Thursday, Dr Mahathir will have a meeting with Koizumi at the Imperial Hotel.

He is also scheduled to receive Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Takeo Hiranuma who is also chairman of the Japan-Malaysia Parliamentarians Friendship League; Minister of Finance Masajuro Shiokawa who is also chairman of the Japan-Malaysia Association; and Minister of State for IT Policy Hiroyuki Hosoda who is also Minister of State for Science and Technology Policy as well as Minister for State for Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs.

Dr Mahathir is expected to arrive at the Narita International Airport at 7.40am local time (6.40am Malaysian time) tomorrow from Frankfurt after attending the Enlarged Group of Eight (G8) nations summit in the French alpine town of Evian. He is scheduled to head for home on Friday.

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