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Abdullah-Japan

DPM'S TRIP REASSURES JAPAN OF M'SIA'S PRO-BUSINESS POLICIES

By: Hafizah Kamaruddin

TOKYO, July 12 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's official visit to Japan, which ends today, is pertinent to reassure the Japanese that Malaysia will continue with the pro-business policies initiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This will be more crucial when the deputy prime minister takes over the country's top leadership this November, given the increasing challenges in the international environment, as evidenced by the global economic slowdown, fight against terrorism, and regional issues, as well as efforts by Asia to rejuvenate its flagging economy.

The cooperative spirit between Malaysia and Japan in setting up the Asian Bond Market, Malaysia-Japan Free Trade Area (FTA) and other initiatives, including collaboration in biotechnology research and development, will further spur the existing relationships to a higher plane.

During the three-day visit, Abdullah made a strong impression on the Japanese of his commitment to continuing the strong bond between the two countries.

He is accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, and a high-powered delegation including Second Finance Minister Datuk Dr Jamaludin Jarjis, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and prominent businessmen.

Stressing that his future international policies would be more dynamic with more emphasis on bilateral cooperation and collaboration, smart partnership and the prosper-thy-neighbour concept, Abdullah has assured the Japanese that Malaysia will continue its interest in Japan, even if Japan's economy stagnates or grows slowly in the coming decades as it is a major component of the East Asian economy.

Japan is Malaysia's second largest trading partner, after the United States, recording total trade of US\$24.6 billion (RM93.5 billion) last year.

While here, Abdullah met Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi who confirmed Japan's involvement in the Malaysia Technical University, which is expected to start at a temporary campus end of this year, to speed up the transfer of technical know-how in terms of materials and manpower from Japan to Asean region.

His meeting with Finance Minister Masajuro Shiokawa and Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Takeo Hiranuma has put into perspective the two countries' move towards a Malaysia-Japan Free Trade Area and the Asian Bond Market.

Both parties have agreed to speed up the economic cooperation with the hope that the two projects will benefit economic development not only between the two countries, but also in the region.

His meeting with the Governor of Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Kyosuke Sinozawa, discussed the need to review the economic assistance that Japan has been giving to Malaysia following Japan's view that Malaysia has graduated from being a developing nation.

The new Yen loan packages to be studied are expected to further enhance Malaysia's development.

Besides meeting the top leaders, Abdullah also made time to meet Japanese corporate leaders, businessmen, parliamentarians and the media,

He put them at ease on issues relating to Malaysia-United States relations after the Iraq war, terrorism, Islam and also regional issues touching on pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's detention in Myanmar.

In the meetings, Abdullah managed to shed his Gaimo-Sho (foreign minister) image, for which he is better known among the Japanese, having held the post for nearly eight years in the last decade, for his up-and-coming image as Souri-Daijin or the prime minister.

The new bilateral trade arrangements discussed will spur greater trade flows and provide the foundation for collaboration between Japanese and Malaysian companies operating in each others' markets as well as regionally and globally.

Clearly these developments indicate that both Japan and Malaysia are prepared to take new approaches and strategies to ensure that the bilateral economic relationships not only continue but emerge stronger and provide mutual benefits.

While here, Abdullah also made a preliminary agreement with University Chiba on collaboration in biotechnology research and development to bring the agricultural sector to greater heights and to boost Malaysia's competitiveness in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in this field.

The university's Horticulture Faculty has agreed to carry out a joint biotechnology research and development (R&D) programme with Malaysian universities and government agencies, such as Universiti Putra Malaysia and Mardi, to boost farmers' income by enabling them to get higher yields and better quality agricultural products, besides helping to develop small- and medium-scale enterprises with agro-based biotechnology.

Confident that the biotechnology industry has a very big potential in the future, Abdullah wants the Look East Policy to give more emphasis to such courses.

In view of the vast potential of biotechnology, the policy which in the early stage of implementing stressed technical training, needs to be reviewed in line with the challenges of the new century.

Abdullah returns home tomorrow a satisfied man, having received the strong support and commitment of the Japanese, especially the leaders and corporate figures, in ensuring that the existing relationships will be enhanced and diversified in facing future challenges when he becomes the captain of the ship.

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