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Abdullah-Japan

ENHANCED TIES AHEAD BETWEEN KL AND TOKYO, SAYS ABDULLAH

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 9 (Bernama) -- On the eve of his departure to Japan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that Kuala Lumpur looks forward to boosting the good bilateral relations it already enjoys with Tokyo.

He said this would be conveyed during talks with his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi.

"It is the first time that I'll be meeting him as the Malaysian Prime Minister. And I would like to say again something I've said before, that I would like to continue not just with the good relations we have but to continue making efforts to deepen and expand bilateral relations between Japan and Malaysia," he told a group of Japanese journalists in an interview, here, ahead of the visit,

Abdullah is travelling to Japan to attend the Asean-Japan Commemorative Summit on Thursday, his first appearance abroad after becoming Malaysia's fifth prime minister on Oct 31.

Discussions with Koizumi, he said, might also touch on matters pertaining to the enhancement of bilateral trade and investment as well as Malaysia's 'Look East Policy'.

Apart from bilateral ties, Abdullah also fielded questions on the upcoming summit, developments in Iraq, Myanmar and China as well as Malaysia's relations with the United States and Australia.

Describing the Asean-Japan summit as important, he said it would be the first time that he would be meeting other Asean leaders since taking over from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the helm of the nation.

On the Look East Policy, Abdullah said it had brought a lot of advantages to Malaysian students and young workers who pursued studies and training programmes in Japan.

This, he said, had proven to be a boon to both Malaysian and Japanese firms operating in the country for it allowed them to recruit Malaysians who understood the Japanese work culture.

Abdullah lauded the active Kuala Lumpur-Tokyo ties, saying that they went from the level of prime ministers right down to people-to-people contacts and the business leaders from both sides.

The prime minister also said that Japan and Malaysia were going to have a free trade arrangement "soon".

Without going into the details, he said: "We want it as soon as possible. The rest is for the officials to proceed."

Queried on the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse, Abdullah said this should not create fear.

"It is something that we'd like to see as a good opportunity. China can provide us with a good market. Of course we'll have to make sure that we develop our own niches and products that will be suitable and wanted by the China market," he said.

On Japan's decision to dispatch ground troops to Iraq for humanitarian purposes, he said it was entirely up to Japan to engage in that endeavour.

Abdullah said the situation in war-ravaged Iraq was unpredictable and volatile with the opposition to the presence of American occupiers still very strong.

"It is a pity that the war has been won but the peace has not been won," he added.

On Myanmar, he said it was important to continue talking to the

government in Yangon with the hope that this could bring about changes in the country.

Touching on Malaysia's relations with the United States and Australia, Abdullah said that although Kuala Lumpur might differ "very seriously" on certain political issues, the overall ties with Washington and Canberra remained strong.

-- BERNAMA

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