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Mahathir-Departure

MAHATHIR DEPARTS FOR KL, BIDS FAREWELL

By: Salbiah Said

TOKYO, June 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad departed for Kuala Lumpur today after a three-day visit to Japan in what is seen as his last as Prime Minister prior to his planned departure from office in October.

At last night's dinner organised by Nikkei in conjunction with its ninth conference on the "Future of Asia: Genesis of a New Order", Dr Mahathir said that 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 that this would be his last visit to Japan as premier but his last participation to the Nikkei conference, which in the words of Malaysian ambassador Datuk Marzuki Mohamed Noor, "the conference will not be the same without Dr Mahathir".

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 more interest.

For Dr Mahathir, this year's conference was a stimulating one given that Asean and Japanese leaders were able to sit together and discuss issues of mutual interest. Dr Mahathir was also 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 held after his keynote address.

At the dinner, the Malaysian premier said that the round table in particular, was interesting, as many questions were raised by the participants seeking the Asean leaders' views on issues such as the North Korean nuclear plans, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, Japan's role in Asia, and also the Thai-initiated Asian Bond Market.

The three-day programme has been packed with two conferences, courtesy calls by three Japanese ministers and a tour to Riken (the institute of Physical and Chemical Research) Yokohama Institute, which undertakes basic and applied scientific research in a diverse range of fields including physics, engineering, chemistry, biology and medical science.

Prior to the tour, he was briefed on the BioValley master plan by its architect, Dr Kisho Kurokawa, and held discussions with researchers and representatives of Japanese pharmaceutical companies.

While here, Dr Mahathir held a meeting with his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi. He also held a meeting with former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who is also chairman of the Institute for International Policy Studies (IIPS), on the first day of his visit, just one-and-a-half hours after arriving at the Imperial Hotel, where he was staying.

Dr Mahathir flew in from Frankfurt on Tuesday after attending the annual summit of the Enlarged Group of Eight (G8) leaders in the French alpine town of Evian.

On hand to send off Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali at the Narita International Airport were Marzuki and embassy officials.

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