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Mahathir-Visit

TOKYO'S FIRST GRAND HOTEL AWAITS DR M'S ARRIVAL

By: Salbiah Said

TOKYO, June 1 (Bernama) -- A one-and-a-half-hour ride from Narita Airport will take one to Tokyo's first grand hotel, the Imperial Hotel, which is set to welcome its distinguished Malaysian guests, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Dr Mahathir, who is scheduled to arrive here for a five-day working visit beginning tomorrow after attending the annual summit of the enlarged Group of Eight (G8) leaders in the French alpine town of Evian, France, is a patron of this five star hotel.

"I do not remember how many times your Prime Minister has stayed in this hotel, but Dr Mahathir usually stays here whenever he comes to Japan," Hiroshi Yamamoto, Manager, Protocol for Imperial Hotel, told Bernama here today.

As in the previous years, the welcoming ceremony will be a simple one, yet dignified, amid tight security within the hotel premises, said Yamamoto. A 24-hour security is already in place at the hotel.

"Dr Mahathir is a great statesman and has brought many changes to your country. And, Japan has enjoyed excellent relations with Malaysia since he became Prime Minister (in 1981)," said Yamamoto, who has also been informed of Dr Mahathir's planned retirement in October.

Also on the list of honoured guests are three Asean leaders, Philippines President Arroyo Gloria Macapagal, Thai Premier Thaksin Shinawatra and Singapore's Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who are expected to hold talks with Dr Mahathir at the hotel on Thursday, said Yamamoto.

Today, foreign guests including from Malaysia, have started to trickle in to the hotel, which boasts of Asean dignitaries, such as Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei. Last year, it received German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who came to Tokyo for the World Cup.

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