

03/06/2004

Learning experience for Japanese

By Hardev Kaur

THE Prime Minister's first trip to Japan since taking over the top job is going to be a learning experience for Japanese politicians and businessmen.

They are eager to hear Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's views on East Asia and his ideas on the future direction the region should take.

Abdullah, who arrived yesterday on a two-day working visit, will deliver the keynote address at the 10th Nikkei International conference on the "Future of Asia - Laying the Groundwork for Asian Regional Integration".

Others attending the annual conference include former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

During the visit, Abdullah will meet his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi. There is no set agenda but bilateral, regional and international issues are expected to be raised during the meeting.

Former Japanese Foreign Minister Dr Taro Nakayama will call on Abdullah. He is currently Chairman of Japan Parliamentarians' Population and Asian Population and Development Association.

Abdullah and Taro had both served as foreign ministers of their respective countries at the same time.

Malaysia's Ambassador to Tokyo, Datuk M.N. Marzuki, said Malaysia- Japan relations were "mature" and in excellent state at all levels - government, political, business and at the people-to-people level.

He said bilateral trade has been consistent.

On average, Malaysia's exports to Japan total US\$1 billion (RM3.8 billion) a month.

On the investment front, more than 100 new projects with Japanese funds were approved last year.

According to the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (Mida), approved investments from Japan valued at RM1.3 billion last year, more than double the RM587.4 million recorded in 2002.

In the first three months of this year, more than 20 projects were approved.

Some 1,400 Japanese companies operate in Malaysia with more than 700 in manufacturing. There is also a sizeable Japanese community residing in Malaysia.

Malaysia remains a choice destination for Japanese foreign direct investments. Among Asean members, Malaysia ranks among the top three, said Marzuki.

He said Mida was doing "a fantastic job" and there is a "very high comfort level" among Japanese investors in Malaysia.

The tourist numbers are also on the rise.

In the first four months of the year, more than 100,000 Japanese tourists visited Malaysia. Last year, 200,000 Japanese tourists made their way to Malaysia.

(END)