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HIRANUMA-MAHATHIR

JAPAN PAYS TRIBUTE TO DR MAHATHIR FOR STRENGTHENING MALAYSIA-JAPAN
TIES

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

TOKYO, July 19 (Bernama) -- Japan pays tribute to prime minister
Datuk
Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who announced his intention to step down
late
next year, for having played a crucial role in strengthening
Malaysia-Japan
relations during his tenure over the past 21 years.

Japan's Minister of economy, trade and industry, Hiranuma Takeo,
said
that most notable was Dr Mahathir's 'Look East' policy launched 20
years
ago aimed at instilling efficient work ethics among Malaysians to
facilitate the country's economic development.

He said the policy brought both countries considerably closer
together.

"The look east policy proposed by Dr Mahathir right after he
took
office is well known especially among the Japanese community," he
said in
his speech at the seminar on "Business Opportunities in Malaysia
attended
by over 700 participants mostly from Japan.

Also present at the seminar was Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz who is
leading
a trade and investment mission to Japan covering the cities of Osaka
and
Tokyo.

Hiranuma said that since Dr Mahathir took office in 1981,
Malaysia had
developed steadily under his outstanding and farsighted leadership.

He said he was shocked when the prime minister announced his
intention
to step down.

Nevertheless, the minister commended the Prime Minister for
having
instituted a smooth transition of power to his deputy, Datuk Seri
Abdullah
Ahmad Badawi which would continue to sustain Malaysia's political
stability.

He said it was clear that the mutual interdependence between
Malaysia
and Japan had developed further over the past 20 years by reflecting
on the
trade and investment relations between the two countries.

The Malaysian trade structure has shifted from exporting mainly

agriculture products and oil and its-related products to high-tech industries including electronic equipments which accounted for 60 percent of the total exports.

Over the past 20 years, actual per capital GDP has almost doubled and it reached US\$3,852 in 2000.

These economic developments were achieved by policies introduced by Prime Minister, Datuk Dr Mahathir.

Over this period, the average tariff rate was brought down from 21 percent in 1988 to 9.1 percent and the total amount of FDIs was US \$65.4 billion," which shows that our economic relations have strengthened remarkably," he said.

"Now, our relations have changed from mere trading such as the export of energy from Malaysia and the import of industrial products from Japan to a new era of the so-called horizontal division of labour in East Asia," he said.

Takashi Onda, the secretary-general of the Asean Promotion Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism, who was also present at the seminar, said "there were some people who might be anxious about the future political stability of Malaysia.

"However, Malaysia has a strong lineup of efficient and leading politicians like Rafidah."

"Therefore, I do not think there are any problems in shifting to the next generation after Dr Mahathir's retirement," he said.

"We should think that this announcement by the Prime Minister has provided better prospects for a smooth political transition in a year's time," said Onda. -- BERNAMA

MR MAD KTC