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Book-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR TO LAUNCH A BOOK BASED ON HIS ARTICLES IN JAPAN

By: D. Arul Rajoo

OSAKA, JAPAN, Jan 16 (Bernama) -- "Voice from Asia to Japan", a compilation of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's views on various topics that appeared as a series of articles in the Mainichi Shimbun Japanese newspaper, will be launched here on Thursday.

The prime minister will launch both the Japanese and English versions of the book during his four-day visit which starts on Thursday.

"This is a dream come true for me after 17 years. The main reason I wanted to become a journalist was to have a chance to interview Dr Mahathir...a leader I admire from my university days," the book's author, Akiko Kato, said today.

Kato, the newspaper's Hong Kong bureau chief, said the idea to write a book on the prime minister came after she read Dr Mahathir's book, "The Malay Dilemma."

"I was shocked to read what he wrote in the book, about race differences and others... we don't have it here," said Kato who has been with the newspaper for the past 20 years.

Kato said her first interview with the prime minister was in May, 1998, but the idea to write a series of articles came when Malaysia was going through difficult times during the Asian economic crisis.

She said Malaysia was practically "under siege" at that time as former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was arrested and the foreign media was writing reports based on their own thinking and agenda.

"I had wanted to report about Malaysia for a long time and I wanted to do it in a different perspective. I put this idea to the prime minister and he agreed," Kato said.

Dr Mahathir was also looking for a platform to write himself, to tell the true story and provide insight on his far-reaching thoughts on how the world would shape, she said.

Kato said the whole region was undergoing its worst economic crisis in

recent years but Dr Mahathir was the only Asian leader who could elaborate, give hindsight and analyse the whole problem.

She said that when Dr Mahathir attended a symposium on Asian economic currency in Tokyo in October 1998, everyone misunderstood him, especially after he attacked currency speculators and skepticism about Malaysia's fixed exchange rate and regulation of short-term capital flows.

In the course of writing the interviews, she flew to Kuala Lumpur every month since December, 1998. The series of articles, entitled "Dr Mahathir's World Analysis" were published monthly from February 1999 to June last year.

"Normally, I spent a week there and the interview will run for one hour. I will give him the draft and he will rewrite it," said Kato who also translated the articles for the Japanese version of the book.

The prime minister spoke about his early days, how he was brought up, about the Malays, the Muslim extremists as well as Malaysia's neighbours and his visits to China and Japan.

Kato said Dr Mahathir also shared his thoughts on various issues including globalisation and on why he likes Japan and the reason behind the implementation of the Look East Policy in the 1980s.

Asked about the response from the Japanese people to the articles, Kato said it was very good as Dr Mahathir had the foresight and deep analysis.

"We don't have intellectual politicians like him here," she said in jest.

The book was put on sale last month and costs Yen 1,700 (about RM54).

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