

Wide, varied agenda to mark visit by Abdullah

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FROM a rare audience with the Emperor to a factory tour and a lecture on Islam Hadhari, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's six-day working visit to Japan has an itinerary as wide and varied as can be.

The Prime Minister arrived yesterday, direct from Sharm El-Sheikh halfway round the globe in Egypt where he attended the World Economic Forum for West Asia.

And while here, he will speak at the 12th Nikkei Conference, of which the *New Straits Times* is one of the sponsors, on Thursday.

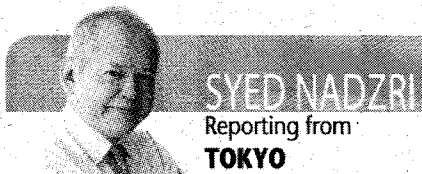
The high-profile international convention, which has without fail always featured the country's prime minister since its inception during Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's tenure, has also included other eminent world leaders on its stage such as Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, its Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, former US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Indonesian Finance Minister Dr Jusuf Anwar.

Dr Mahathir, too, is due to take part in a dialogue on Friday.

Abdullah is scheduled to speak on measures to chart the course for an Asian economic integration.

This will be one of the two lectures by the Prime Minister, the other being on Friday on Islam Hadhari and the promotion of good governance at the equally prestigious U Thant Distinguished Lecture series organised by the United Nations University here.

Apart from that, Abdullah will today visit the Matsushita Panasonic Centre, the



main research and development centre of the Japanese electrical and home appliance-maker that produces the Panasonic brand of goods.

This will be followed by a Japanese Government briefing on some of the most effective technologies devised by the country in producing biofuel.

Abdullah is scheduled to have a bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi tomorrow.

It is unclear yet whether the Prime Minister will at all meet his Singapore counterpart or Senior Lee on the sidelines of the conference.

No official meeting has been scheduled so far.

However, the prospect is mouth-watering considering that it would be the first time top leaders from both countries are meeting since Malaysia called off the project to build a half-bridge to replace the Causeway on its side of the Johor Strait.

One of the highlights of Abdullah's visit should be the audience with Emperor Akihito, which will take place at the Imperial palace this afternoon.

Malaysian Ambassador to Japan Datuk M.N. Marzuki said such audiences were normally accorded only to leaders on official visits to Japan.