

Broaden horizons during trips abroad, says Abdullah

NST- 28/5/2007

■ **By Fauziah Ismail**
news@nst.com.my

OSAKA: Trips abroad, be it official or working visits, are not just about the fixed itinerary. It is about observing the culture of the countries visited and finding those that can be emulated back home.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's visit to Japan last week, his fourth since he took office in 2003, was not only about the Nikkei Conference he attended or the bilateral talks he had with Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe.

The prime minister used the visit to observe what the Japanese do best and what examples he could bring home for Malaysians to emulate.

Japan has undoubtedly played a significant role in Malaysia's history and indus-

trialisation process.

Malaysia's involvement in the heavy industries, which set the tone for the local automotive industry, was through the assistance of Japan.

Probably Japan's most telling presence in Malaysia is in the household. No Malaysian home is without a Japanese product.

As Malaysians pursue the government's objective of reaching a developed-nation status by 2020, it would be best if they also looked at the Japanese values.

It cannot be denied that the Japanese are immersed in their own culture and lifestyle. That is the uniqueness of their way of life. Their civic-mindedness and the culture of maintenance are worth emulating.

"Did you check their toilets?"

Did you notice how clean the city is?" Abdullah asked newsmen covering his five-day visit, which ended on Friday.

Indeed, the toilets, especially at the Narita International Airport where millions of local and foreign passengers go through, and the city were impeccably clean.

Abdullah knows only too well this aspect of Japanese culture. His late wife's family is Japanese. And in Japan, being clean is very important.

Citing an example, he said the late Datin Seri Endon Mahmood's uncle was a stickler for cleanliness.

"Every time after he eats, he will fold the wrapper and look for a dustbin. If one cannot be found, he will keep it in his jacket pocket until he finds one."

He also said his late wife had

a habit that was typically Japanese. "She would check that everything was in the proper place before and after using the bathroom. Her mother did that, too."

Queuing is also part of the culture.

"Do you see people or cars jumping queue? The queue may be long but they still wait their turn," Abdullah said.

He was also impressed with the Japanese culture of maintenance, especially of public buildings and places.

He was visibly upset when reminded of the Malaysian habit of passing the buck to others.

"This has to stop. The departments and agencies concerned must take responsibility. Whoever is responsible must know what he is responsible for and take action with-

out being told to do so," he added.

After 50 years of bilateral relations, why have Malaysians yet to learn all these from the Japanese?

"That's an interesting question," he told the *New Straits Times* at one of his two scheduled news conferences during the visit.

"We are hoping that the 14,000 Malaysians who stayed in Japan for training and studies under the Look East Policy would go home and continue with what they learnt here," he said.

Abdullah was the minister in charge of implementing the policy when it was introduced 25 years ago. Having exposed Malaysians to the Japanese work ethics and culture, Abdullah is hopeful that it would rub off on Malaysians.