

MEETING JAPANESE COUNTERPART ON FRIDAY

'PM'S JAPAN VISIT REFLECTS CLOSE BOND'

Highlight is Dr M's keynote address at Nikkei's 25th International Conference on 'The Future of Asia'



VEENA RUSH

TOKYO

TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad's three-day working visit to Japan, which begins today, reflects the dynamism of the longstanding bilateral relationship between the Asian neighbours.

Malaysian Ambassador to Japan, Datuk Kennedy Jawan, said the prime minister's working visit, which marked his fourth since assuming leadership of the country last May, bears the hallmarks of a significant, close bond with Japan.

He said the highlight of the visit would be Dr Mahathir's presence at Nikkei's 25th "International Conference on The Future of Asia" tomorrow, where he would deliver a keynote address and engage in a dialogue with participants.

"This marks the 21st time he is attending the Nikkei Conference since its inception in 1995. There will be many keen on hearing Dr Mahathir's views on a wide range of topics and issues, especially those concerning global interest."

Jawan was speaking at a press conference with the Malaysian media at the Imperial Hotel here yesterday.

"The International Conference on The Future of Asia" has been an annual conference hosted by Nikkei Inc since 1995, where government and business leaders gather to share their vision for the future of Asia. The theme of the conference this year is 'Seeking a new Global Order — Overcoming the Chaos'."

The prime minister and Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali are scheduled to arrive in Tokyo tonight.

Present were Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Marzuki Yahya and other senior government officials.

Jawan said Dr Mahathir was scheduled to attend the Malaysia-Japan Business Dialogue with more than 20 prime movers of local industry, and would deliver a speech titled "Malaysia's Current Situation and Expected Investment from Japan".

He said the prime minister would be delivering a speech at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan before being honoured at a dinner in conjunction with the Nikkei Conference, which would be attended by his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe.

Dr Mahathir's visit will conclude with a bilateral meeting with Abe at the prime minister's office on Friday. Both leaders are expected to discuss developments of mutual interest on the bilateral, regional and global stages.

Jawan said the solid bilateral relations between the countries were further strengthened after Malaysia recently issued a 200 billion yen (RM7.3 billion) Samurai Bond, guaranteed by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

"Apart from traditional sectors, such as manufacturing and automotive, Japan has voiced interest in exploring new areas which can trigger positive investment sentiment," he said.

Japan was Malaysia's fourth largest trade partner last year, with trade totalling RM132.57 billion.

Malaysia, meanwhile, was Japan's 14th largest trade partner and fifth in Asean after Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore.

Japan is listed as among Malaysia's largest sources of foreign investment. Up to December, a total of 2,661 factory projects in the manufacturing sector saw Japanese involvement, with a total value of RM84.2 billion.

Jawan said efforts were being intensified to draw more Japanese foreign direct investment into Malaysia, encompassing existing and new sectors.

"On top of boosting the tourism sector, education is also given priority with more than 3,500 Malaysian students currently pursuing their studies in Japan. Malaysia's political stability has greatly contributed to stronger bilateral ties."

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