

Abe Supports Najib's Plan

KUALA LUMPUR: JAPANESE Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is visiting Malaysia today, has expressed his support for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's endeavour to modernise the Look East Policy under the second wave of the policy, which started in Malaysia in 1982.

"I believe this will allow the policy to move further forward to capture the needs of the times. Japan intends to actively cooperate with Malaysia so that the Look East Policy will continue to function for an extended period as the basis of our bilateral relationship," he told the New Straits Times via email from Tokyo.

Abe said his was the first official visit by a Japanese prime minister to Malaysia in the last six years.

"There is a strong bond between Malaysia and Japan, which has evolved on the basis of the Look East Policy for more than 30 years. In addition, the Japan-Malaysia Economic Partnership Agreement, which came into effect in 2006, created a closer bilateral economic relationship.

"Against this background and with Malaysia aspiring to become a developed country by 2020, I think now is the time to accelerate our partnership in new fields, such as infrastructure development, by utilising high technology."

Abe said he would also promote specific projects for cooperation in the economic, political and security areas as well as in all forms of exchanges.

"I hope my visit will be an opportunity to elevate the Japan-Malaysia relations, which have developed on the basis of the Look East Policy, to an 'evolutionary new partnership' that captures the needs of the times."

Abe said he hoped to strengthen Japan's partnership with ASEAN as well as bilateral cooperation with the three Southeast Asian countries - Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines he was visiting on this trip.

This is in tandem with this year marking the 40th year of the ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation.

"ASEAN, which deepens its integration and grows continuously, is increasing its importance for the stability and prosperity of the whole of East Asia under the ever changing strategic environment in the Asia Pacific region". Strengthening ties with ASEAN itself is valuable for Japan, and at the same time, it gives additional benefit to Japan, by allowing it to be part of the growth in the region. That is exactly why I attach particular importance to the relations with ASEAN countries."

Abe said Japan had been an earnest supporter of the integration of ASEAN as an economic community projected to take effect in 2015.

"To assist the integration, Japan has been promoting concrete cooperation. Among them are boosting ASEAN connectivity, redressing disparities, disaster management and youth exchange.

"I will continue to strengthen relations with ASEAN through dialogues and exchange based on the 'five Principles of Japan's ASEAN Diplomacy', which I had stated in Jakarta in January.

"I look forward to hosting the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit at the end of this year and welcome leaders of ASEAN countries to Tokyo."

Abe said it was important to promote mutual understanding between Japan and Malaysia, and that exchanges through tourism were of value.

He said from this standpoint, Japan had, on July 1, restored its waiver of the requirement for short-term visas for Malaysians, to promote Japan as a tourist destination to the Southeast Asian market.

He added Japan had embarked on a host of activities, including business session for travel agents in Southeast Asia last May, the ASEAN-Japan Policy Dialogue on Tourism Cooperation last June, large-scale participation in travel fairs, such as the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) last September, and seminars on the proper reception of Muslim tourists.

"I hope that many more Malaysians will visit Japan and be attracted to its beauty and charm."

Asked what benefits Japan and the rest of the world could expect under his administration, Abe said he had, after taking office as prime minister last December, endeavoured to take the Japanese economy out of deflation with the three arrows of "bold monetary easing", "flexible fiscal policy", and "growth strategy".

"Phasal transition from contraction to expansion of the Japanese economy, the world's third largest economy, I am confident, will contribute to the global growth, especially in Asia. Particularly, the growth strategy, which I just announced recently, will stimulate private investment. It will generate a 'virtuous cycle of growth', under which improved productivity will effectively bring income increase."

Abe said the "growth strategy" included policies to strengthen the partnership with ASEAN countries to grow together.

"For example, Japan will promote the increasing resilience of infrastructure such as region-wide road and power networks."