

8月5日付「ニュー・ストレーツ・タイムズ」紙13面及び20面

Boosting Japan-Malaysia ties

ASPIRATIONS: Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida shares his views on the strategic partnership between Japan and Malaysia, and hopes to boost ties between the two nations



Fumio Kishida

DIPLOMATIC relations between Japan and Malaysia, which was established in 1957, has since been strengthened over the years through the implementation of the Look East Policy, economic relations, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Japanese Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida arrives today for a two-day visit to attend Asean+3 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting. During his visit, he hopes to strengthen ties between Japan and Malaysia.

Q: Japanese and Malaysian leaders realise that our nations share strategic interests. How can we enhance and construct our "Strategic Partnership"?

A: As the foreign affairs minister of Japan, this is my first official visit to Malaysia, for which I am delighted and honoured. Our visitors to your country, reaching no less than 550,000 last year, thankfully appreciate your hospitality, vigorously build business partnerships and heartily admire natural beauty and traditional culture.

The Look East Policy of Malaysia has been a cornerstone of our bilateral relations. It is reassuring to note that so many Malaysians, some 15,000, who resided and studied in

Japan under this policy, are serving diligently in your government and industrial sectors. This underpins the cordial bond of our two nations.

Japan-Malaysia bilateral ties have been deepening and expanding in all arenas, including politico-security fields. On the occasion of the recent visit of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to Japan last May, our two leaders reaffirmed their conviction of upholding existing shared strategic interests in our nations, and decided, based on the cooperation built thus far, to lay down our relations as a "Strategic Partnership".

I will strengthen our ties with Malaysia through various initiatives, such as exploring an agreement for expanding defence equipment and technology cooperation, and enhancing maritime cooperation, including assisting the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA). I will also promote cultural and human exchanges, push forward the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths and support the Malaysia-Japan International Insti-

tute of Technology.

Further, in the domain of economic relations, I will do my part to mobilise support to enable Malaysia to achieve its goals of becoming a high value-added economy and acquiring developed country status by 2020 by driving investments from Japan and offering assistance in infrastructure building, including laying a high-speed rail link.

In addition to these efforts to strengthen our bilateral relations, I will do my utmost to drive Japan, a Strategic Partner of Malaysia, to serve to ensure the stability and prosperity of this region and the world. Japan will offer its full support to Malaysia in playing its role as the chair of Asean this year.

Q: A challenge for Asean looms ahead over the expansion of its horizon. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an attempt to expand Asean free trade into East Asia, is to complete negotiations by year-end. What can Japan do for its success?

→ Turn to Page 20

'Malaysia will benefit from a revitalised Japan'

→ From Page 13

A: To establish RCEP is a grand attempt to create an extensive regional economic zone among countries which make up half of the world population, 30 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and half of the trade of Japan.

Promoting trade and investment liberalisation, and establishing rules on intellectual property rights and competition in the Asia-Pacific region will galvanise growth in this region, not just in Japan. Japan has, in particular, been placing high importance in this attempt.

Eight rounds of negotiations with three ministerial meetings have been held to date. Naturally, negotiations among 16 countries with various positions have confronted obstacles and hurdles.

However, Japan is willing to continue leading the negotiations to achieve a "modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually benefi-

cial" economic partnership agreement, as agreed among the ministers at the inception of the RCEP negotiations.

Q: On the South China Sea, Asean leaders shared "serious concerns" on land reclamation, which, they evaluated, "has eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace, security and stability". How can Japan help with the safety and security of this region?

A: The problem regarding the South China Sea can affect peace and stability of this region and is a matter of concern for the international community, including Japan.

Japan is gravely concerned about any unilateral action taken, including large scale reclamations intended to change the status quo, which have been causing tensions among the countries concerned. Japan has been stressing the importance of countries refraining from resorting

to any unilateral actions as they may lead to heightening tensions, and that they should act in accordance with the rule of law.

Japan shares common recognition with other nations on the importance of self-restraint and peaceful resolution of disputes based on international law. Japan will continue to do its utmost to enhance dialogues and cooperation with Asean members, as well as other like-minded nations.

Japan has been extending capacity building assistance to Asean nations and has been conducting joint exercises with the United States and the Philippines navies in the South China Sea and its surrounding waters.

For Malaysia, Japan has been offering its MMEA assistance in various fields, including human resource development and maintenance of equipment. The leaders of both countries decided in May to enter into negotiations for an agree-

ment enabling the transfer of defence equipment.

Japan has been placing importance on the role that Malaysia, the Asean chair, plays in the stability of this region. Japan is ready to coordinate with Malaysia on a number of occasions, including the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting currently being held and the Asean Summit in November.

Q: After 15 years of stagnation, the Japanese economy appears to have started to rise again. How do you evaluate the effects of Abenomics? How will Abenomics influence the economy in East Asia, including Malaysia?

A: Abenomics, economic policy mix with the so-called "three arrows", has been achieving good outcomes, as evidenced by the continuous improvement in employment and income levels.

The ordinary profit of Japanese companies is at a record high while

the unemployment rate is kept at a low level. Wage increase rate this year has achieved a highest point over the last 17 years since 1998. Japan's GDP growth also reached an annualised rate of 3.9 per cent for the first quarter of this year, higher than the average forecast made by private sector organisations.

Last June, the Japanese government revised its growth strategy. It will consolidate its move to overcome any deflationary trend and will reconstruct the foundation for future growth.

The economic ties between Japan and Malaysia, and Japan and East Asia, are remarkably close. Japan is one of Malaysia's major trading partners, while Malaysia has large amount of direct investment from Japanese companies doing business in Malaysia. East Asian economies, including Malaysia, will gain immense benefits from a revitalised Japan, which owes a great deal to Abenomics.