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Japan PM backs infra dev't, peace efforts in disputed sea

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Japanese Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe has committed to support the Philippine infrastructure development program

and continue to actively work with the country's peace and stability efforts in the region by providing defense capacity building assistance, noting that both countries have already entered a stage of strengthened **▶13**

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Japan PM backs infra...

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strategic partnership.

In a written interview with the Manila Bulletin, Prime Minister Abe stressed Japan's commitment to support the Philippines in its economic development as well as the territorial issue against China.

"Japan has been actively working with the Philippines in keeping the peace and stability in this region by providing assistance in capacity building and also through joint-exercises between Japan Self-Defense Forces and the Philippine Navy. We hope to continue to advance cooperation with your country in these and various other aspects," said Abe in response to the question if the Philippines can count on Japan's support in its territorial dispute against China.

Concern over reclamation

The Prime Minister also expressed concern that any unilateral action, including the large-scale reclamation and construction of facilities for military use in those areas, may increase regional tensions.

"We, along with many APEC economies, are deeply concerned that any unilateral action, including the large-scale reclamation and construction of facilities for military use in those areas, may increase regional tensions," he said.

The Prime Minister has urged for the observance of the three principles in the "rule of law at sea." These three principles are: 1) states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law; 2) states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims; and 3) states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means.

"It is important to uphold these principles and refrain from acting unilaterally

since this only increases regional tensions," he said.

On its support for the country's infrastructure development, the Prime Minister cited the country's confident and steady economic progress under the strong leadership of President Aquino, adding that many Japanese, such as those in the manufacturing industry, have also gained from this progress, which is propelled by the nation's young, abundant, and English-speaking workforce.

Stronger infrastructures

But in order to maximize its national potential and achieve inclusive growth, Abe stressed it is essential for the Philippines to develop stronger infrastructures and to come up with improved logistics and people movement systems.

During President Aquino's recent state visit to Japan, both leaders have agreed to work closely through the "Cooperation Roadmap for Quality Infrastructure Development in the Transport Sector in Metropolitan Manila Area".

Both countries have established a Ministerial-Level steering committee, which met and have had fruitful discussions earlier this year in October. Japan also intends to continue assisting, through yen-loan support, in vital projects like the "North-South Commuter Railway Project", which is expected to benefit many Filipinos.

Risk factors

But aside from infrastructure, the Prime Minister cited many risk factors, such as climate change, environmental volatility, natural disasters, and pandemics that could impede the country's growth and challenge its stability.

To counter these risks, he urged for

stronger infrastructure and transportation systems along with better farming and healthcare practices play big roles in mitigating the effects of these risk factors and also to secure stability.

"In these respects, we are ready to provide assistance to the Philippines," he said. Aside from the government's assistance, Abe noted that the accelerating investments from the private Japanese businesses in the Philippines would hopefully result in significant improvements in the country's vulnerability rate and standard of living among Filipinos.

Strategic partnership

Abe and Aquino have declared during the latter's recent state visit that both countries have entered a stage of Strengthened Strategic Partnership.

He also revealed that Their Majesties, The Emperor and Empress of Japan, are visiting the country next year for the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

"I sincerely hope that this visit will further enhance the already cordial and warm relations existing between our two countries," he said.

For his participation in the APEC Leaders' meeting, Abe said he will explain Japan's growth strategy through the "Second Stage" of the Abenomics approach and Japan's contribution towards the achievement of quality infrastructure in the Asia Pacific region and the implementation of the regional economic integration.

The Prime Minister also expects lively dialogues about the development of the regional economic integration, the promotion and involvement of SME (Small Medium Enterprise) into the regional and world market, human resources development, and the building of sustainable and resilient regional society.