

"Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue
The Fifth Tokyo Dialogue
Keynote Speech by Mr. Masaji Matsuyama, Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister for
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1. Introduction

I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to all of you who have come from Central Asian countries to attend the Fifth Tokyo Dialogue under the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue. My sincere thanks also go to the Japanese participants in today's forum.

Today, I see many people here from Japanese academic and economic circles who have close ties with Central Asia as well as a large number of students and young people. Such a large attendance bears witness to the steady progress in cooperation between Japan and Central Asia in a wide range of areas.

2. The Significance of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Central Asian countries. To commemorate the occasion, Japan hosted the Fourth Foreign Ministers' Meeting under the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue. The meeting, attended by foreign ministers or high-ranking officials from the participating countries, reviewed 20 years of diplomatic ties and confirmed that the partnership between Japan and Central Asia would be raised to an even higher level.

In this way, Japan has been committed to strengthening its relations with the region. I believe that Central Asia is important to Japan in three major respects.

The first is its geopolitical importance. Central Asia is situated at a crossroads, where the north-south and east-west corridors of the Eurasian Continent meet. Stable development of this geopolitically strategic region will not only benefit Eurasia and but also the international community as a whole.

Second, Central Asia holds a key to addressing three of the pressing challenges facing the international community: (i) how to bring about stability in Afghanistan, (ii) how to prevent the spread of terrorism and Islamic extremism, and (iii) how to crack down on drug trafficking.

Third, Central Asia is rich in such natural resources as oil, natural gas, uranium, and rare metals and earths, which makes the region strategically important for Japan's resources

diplomacy.

Such important Central Asian countries are rich in diversity; however, they have much in common historically, culturally and in other respects. They also share many challenges in nation building. Accordingly, it would be more productive for Central Asian countries to address such common challenges together and promote regional cooperation in order to achieve stable development. In fact, they have already launched a number of regional cooperation projects under the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program and other regional frameworks. It is important to further encourage these moves.

Japan has been supporting stable and self-sustaining development in Central Asia by serving as a catalyst for regional cooperation there. In fact, the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue is a framework that has been launched to that end.

3. The Aim of the Fifth Tokyo Dialogue: Learning from the ASEAN Experience

A total of four foreign ministers' meetings since the launch of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue have allowed the participating countries to widely share the idea of addressing common challenges by working together in the region.

Today's forum discusses the theme of how to promote regional cooperation in the field of trade and investment. The idea behind this theme is that the ASEAN experience should benefit Central Asia. Today, Japanese experts in ASEAN will first review the formation of ASEAN, which has made remarkable progress in regional cooperation in recent years. After analyzing the current status of its economic integration, they will discuss the role played by Japan, which has been deeply involved in the development process of ASEAN.

Then, participants from Central Asian countries will speak about what approach should be taken for regional cooperation towards promoting trade and investment in the region. They will also discuss major challenges and priority sectors to be addressed in attaining that goal. These presentations will be followed by an exchange of views among these speakers and with the floor.

Like Central Asian countries, ASEAN Member States are diverse in such aspects as industrial structure, economic policy, and market scale. Despite such diversity, they have made steady progress in regional cooperation by advancing dialogue for building confidence and starting with areas of common interest. In the process, Japan has extended official development assistance (ODA) to these countries in a variety of sectors, ranging from the development of social infrastructure to the restoration of archaeological remains. In recent years, Japan's ODA to ASEAN Member States has focused on the development of social infrastructure and human resources in less developed areas, thus helping ASEAN to reduce intraregional disparities. The path that ASEAN has taken can provide a useful input for Central Asia. Learning lessons from the ASEAN experience and putting them to practical use can allow the

region to advance regional cooperation more efficiently. I am convinced that today's discussions will help Central Asia to promote regional cooperation towards more trade and investment in the region.

4. Conclusion

In summary, today we will have an intellectual dialogue based on the case study of ASEAN. I hope this approach will provide a fresh perspective for the discussion of regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Thank you.

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