

Prime Minister Abe's Interview with Borneo Bulletin and Brunei Times
Bandar Seri Begawan, 8th October 2013

Q: In looking ahead, what are the challenges in the context of Japan-ASEAN relations and what are the priority areas that both Japan-ASEAN should look into?

A. The Japan-ASEAN relationship is good as never before. I attach great value on our relations with ASEAN, so I have visited numerous ASEAN member nations since I assumed the premiership last December. I hope to act hand-in-hand with ASEAN members in various fields, enhance cooperation and strengthen Japan-ASEAN ties.

Japan has been strengthening relations with ASEAN countries in wide ranging areas, such as politics and security, economy, society and culture, among others. In addition, Japan has actively supported the development of the ASEAN Community 2015.

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation. In December, we will invite ASEAN heads of state and government to Japan to discuss and set out to the world the vision which will shape future Japan-ASEAN relations.

Q: What are the major achievements made by Brunei Darussalam as the ASEAN Chair this year?

A. This year is a milestone, marking the 40th Anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation. I am delighted that Japan-ASEAN relations have been further enhanced thanks to Brunei's arduous efforts as the ASEAN chair. I am very much looking forward to visiting Brunei for the first time in twelve years as Japanese Prime Minister.

Under the leadership of Brunei, this year has seen advancements, such as the commencement of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations and ASEAN-China consultations regarding the Code of

Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. I highly value Brunei's significant role as the ASEAN chair for the peace and prosperity in this region.

Q: Japan and Brunei are both in the TPP and RCEP. There had been plenty of negative reports with regards to the secrecy of the negotiations; the lengthening of patents, which could result in higher medicine prices; the rights of companies to sue the government of a country; and many others, which worry Bruneians and the people of other TPP countries. Could you provide your insights as to how these concerns may be addressed by the negotiating countries? Comparatively, RCEP has met with little or no resistance from the people, why is that so?

A. The TPP Agreement aims to benefit our consumers, support job creation and higher living standards.

Countries participating in TPP negotiations have the common goal of concluding a comprehensive and balanced agreement within the year in order for their citizens to reap as soon as possible the considerable benefits we anticipate from this agreement.

Countries participating in TPP negotiations will share information wherever possible while listening to wide-ranging views received from stakeholders. There remain tough issues, but Japan will continue to actively and constructively contribute to discussions, taking into account various opinions and concerns.

With regard to RCEP negotiations, since the second round of negotiations was conducted just last month, it is difficult to compare this to TPP negotiations. RCEP aims to achieve a comprehensive and mutually beneficial economic partnership.

In every negotiation, Japan will take into consideration a range of opinions and concerns. Japan will work closely with various countries including Brunei so that efforts for the TPP, RCEP, and other agreements will have mutual and positive effects and will lead to the overall growth of the Asia-Pacific region.

Q: Some views in your country have suggested Japan to team up with the United States and ASEAN to counter China's maritime advance. What are your opinions on this suggestion?

A. Japan and other Asia-Pacific region nations reap great benefit from the open sea. The oceans are for everyone, therefore, the basic rules of the ocean, such as peaceful conflict resolution, the freedom of navigation, and compliance to the international law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, must be complied. We should maintain regional peace and stability based on the "rule of law" and not by "force." We believe Japan can cooperate on these issues with Asia-Pacific nations with which we share fundamental values.

Because this year is an important milestone marking the 40th Anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation, we place great value on further strengthening relations with ASEAN member nations with which we have developed longstanding traditional friendly cooperative relations.

At the same time, Japan-China relations is one of Japan's most important bilateral relationships. The relations between Japan and China are inseparable in various fields including our close and mutually-dependent economic relations. Both countries share responsibility for the stability and development of Asia as well as the international community. I hope to advance relations with China based on the notion of "Mutually Beneficial Relationship based on Common Strategic Interests."