

Visiting minister looks forward to develop Brunei-Japan ties further

| MESSAGE BY TARO KONO, FOREIGN MINISTER OF JAPAN |

IT IS my sheer pleasure to be able to visit this beautiful country again as the first Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs in five years to do so. In the early 1990s I was stationed in Singapore as an employee of a private company, and I have fond memories of visiting Brunei twice at that time.

Japan and Brunei are both constitutional monarchies in Asia, and as such have been able to cultivate a close and amicable relationship. Japan has been Brunei's largest trading partner for many years, and Brunei exports 64 per cent of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Japan on value basis. Not only that, a large number of Japanese companies are investing in Brunei aiming to support the diversification of Brunei's economy. These include areas such as methanol production, cultivation of algae used for extraction of astaxanthin, an increasingly popular antioxidant, oil well pipe-threading, and hydrogen supply chain verification.

Today, a Japan Training Group of Maritime Self Defence Force is calling at Muara Port. Going forward, I intend to develop the Japan-Brunei relationship in a multilayered manner and in a broad range of fields, including defence cooperation.

I also intend to deepen dialogue on various regional challenges with Brunei, which has served as the coordinating country for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) with Japan since 2015. Approximately 80 per cent of the crude oil that Japan imports reaches the country by passing through the sea off Brunei known as the South China Sea. Free and open maritime order based on the rule of law is the foundation of the stability and prosperity of the international community. This is a matter of common interest for Japan and Brunei, as both countries are highly dependent on marine transport. A free and open maritime order of the Indo-Pacific region must be a global commons that will bring stability and prosperity equally



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to all nations. To that end, Japan intends to pursue cooperation, hand-in-hand with Brunei, toward realising a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Furthermore, North Korea is posing an unprecedented threat by ignoring the concerns of the international community and blatantly pursuing its nuclear and missile development programmes.

The international community's pressure on North Korea must be maximised by all means, including the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions, in order to compel North Korea to change its policies. Here as well, Japan hopes to see a united approach by Asean through collaborating closely with Brunei as the coordinating country for Japan.

Furthermore, as a fellow advocate of free trade, Japan intends to proactively cooperate with Brunei, a founding member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, to promote free and fair trade and investment rules and economic partnership within the region.

More specifically, Japan hopes to continue to cooperate closely with Brunei to promptly realise the TPP11, the signing ceremony for which is scheduled to be held on March 8, and also to realise the prompt conclusion of a high quality Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Brunei is blessed with a rich culture and natural environment, including tropical rain forests and beautiful seas that could attract large numbers of Japanese tourists.

Likewise, Japan is also attracting close to 30 million tourists a year from countries worldwide. This figure is likely to grow further in the run-up to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. I am hopeful that it will be possible to further enhance people-to-people exchanges between Japan and Brunei, including in the fields of business and tourism.

Manga/anime, cosplay, language, cuisine and other aspects of Japanese culture are hugely popular in Brunei these days. In recent years, youth, students and sports exchanges have been becoming increasingly active.

I sincerely hope that my visit will lead to a higher level of interest for Japan so that the relationship between our two countries may be further strengthened in the future. - *Courtesy of the Embassy of Japan in Brunei Darussalam*