

Japan will cooperate with Malaysia to maintain peace in South China Sea, Indo-Pacific -- Japanese FM



Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi (Photo courtesy: Japan Embassy in Kuala Lumpur)

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By Nabilah Saleh

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 8 (Bernama) -- To ensure the prosperity and stability of the international community, Japan is promoting concrete cooperation with Malaysia and other countries in realising the principles of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP), where many of its essential principles are shared by ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said the regional security environment is becoming increasingly severe, especially in view of North Korea's nuclear and missile development and unilateral attempts to change the status quo with the use of force in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

"The development of Japan and Malaysia, both democracies and trading and maritime nations, has been enabled by a free and open international order based on

the rule of law. With this in mind, Japan is promoting efforts to realise a FOIP”.

Elaborating further, he said Japan is looking forward to also revitalise the East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), of which Malaysia is also a member.

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“We would like to work hand in hand with Malaysia toward regional security and prosperity including cooperation in the Sulu-Celebes Sea and surrounding areas, which are economically and socially vulnerable with frequent piracy, terrorism and natural disasters.

“I see great potential in this cooperation's future,” said Hayashi.

Hayashi told this to Bernama in his written interview in conjunction with his two-day visit to Malaysia from Saturday (Oct 8) to strengthen the bilateral relationship in light of the 65th anniversary of Malaysia-Japan diplomatic relations and also the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy (LEP).

As both countries will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation next year, Hayashi added that his country is looking forward to deepening the existing cooperation with the 10-member regional bloc.

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Malaysia and Japan upgraded their relations from Enhanced Partnership to Strategic Partnership in 2015, when Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Malaysia as Foreign Minister.

Japan is one of Malaysia's top foreign direct investment (FDI) insources in terms of implemented manufacturing projects, with a total investment value of US\$688 million (RM3.03 billion) recorded from January to June this year.

The following is the full text of Bernama's written interview with Hayashi:

1. How do you view the current state of Japan-Malaysia diplomatic relations that now spans 65 years and what are the areas of cooperation that both countries need to enhance further in the next decade? Will the renewed interest on Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP), which has entered its 40th year, and the establishment of Tsukuba University branch campus in Malaysia be among the key agenda in pushing forth the bilateral relations to another level? Anything else in the cards to renew the spirit of LEP?

I am pleased to visit Malaysia as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Malaysia and the 40th anniversary of Malaysia's Look East Policy. This year saw a series of high-level visits between Japan and Malaysia including the visit by former Prime Minister Abe to Malaysia as the special envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan in March and the visits to Japan by the Prime Minister of Malaysia H.E. Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia H.E. Dato' Sri Saifuddin, Senior Minister and Minister of International Trade and Industry H.E. Dato' Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali and others in May. This is proof of the good bilateral relationship between both countries.

Japan and Malaysia have long enjoyed a good relationship. Looking at the world today, the free and open international order based on the rule of law is being challenged by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force. Furthermore, there are other challenges including global issues such as climate change. Japan and Malaysia, as strategic partners who share fundamental values and strategic interests, would like to work together to create an international order for the next era. We also have great potential to expand the scope of cooperation in areas of the economy, security, people-to-people and cultural exchange and to address regional and global challenges. I look forward to further strengthening cooperation with Malaysia in a wide range of areas.

The Look East Policy, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, is the foundation for the good bilateral relations between Japan and Malaysia as well as Malaysia's development. I welcome the many events being held this year to commemorate the 40th anniversary. As we work towards overcoming the COVID-19 disaster, it is important and timely to constantly evolve the policy to meet the demands of the times. For example, there is an idea to expand the policy to include Malaysia's priority areas such as supply chain resilience, digital and green industries.

The plan to establish a branch campus in Malaysia by the University of Tsukuba, one of Japan's leading national universities, is a new development of the Look East Policy. It will be the first overseas branch established by a Japanese university if this plan is realised. I hope that the branch campus will become a centre for Japanese-style higher education in ASEAN and its neighbouring regions and that it will produce many talented young people who will be active in various fields. I also hope that many Malaysians with bright futures will study at the branch campus of the University of Tsukuba and become our future partners.

2. How Malaysia and Japan can work together to maintain and strengthen peace and prosperity in both the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region? What and how can Japan contribute on security and maritime safety, as well as capacity building for the realisation of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)?

The regional security environment is becoming increasingly severe especially in view of North Korea's nuclear and missile development and unilateral attempts to change the status quo with the use of force in the East China Sea and South China Sea. The development of Japan and Malaysia, both democracies and trading and maritime nations, has been enabled by a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

Maintaining and strengthening this order will ensure peace, stability and prosperity not only for Japan and Malaysia but also for the entire international community. With this in mind, Japan is promoting efforts to realise a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". In particular, Japan is supportive of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which shares many essential principles with the FOIP and is promoting concrete cooperation with Malaysia and other countries to realise both initiatives.

Notably, Japan provided two patrol vessels to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) in 2016. I understand that these two vessels are fully utilised to protect the waters surrounding Malaysia today. Furthermore, Japan has been providing support for capacity building of coast guard officers since 2005, when the MMEA was established. Currently, Japan and Malaysia are providing training to the coast guard of third countries with Malaysian coast guard officers serving as instructors, and Japan is an important partner in this area as well.

Furthermore, Japan will revitalise cooperation with the East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), of which Malaysia is also a member. We would like to work hand in hand with Malaysia toward regional security and prosperity including cooperation in the Sulu-Celebes Sea and surrounding areas, which are economically and socially vulnerable with frequent piracy, terrorism and natural disasters. I see great potential in the future of this cooperation.

3. As the world is facing inflationary pressure, food and energy security issues and supply chain bottlenecks due to the fallout from the Ukraine- Russia conflict, how does Japan as a developed nation sees itself playing a leadership role in helping developing nations like Malaysia mitigate the challenges ahead?

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a severe global shortage of energy and food supplies as well as escalating prices. Access to affordable food and energy is a basic human need and we are deeply concerned that these are more threatened now than ever. It is necessary to ensure that each and every human being has access to food and energy through assistance to vulnerable and susceptible countries.

Japan has been actively providing food aid to vulnerable countries. For example, we have provided food aid to Middle Eastern and African countries and supported the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine. At the 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD8) spearheaded by Japan in August, Japan announced that it would provide support to strengthen food production and human resource development in the agricultural sector. In the Asian region, we are also working with the WFP and other organisations to improve food security and nutrition.

With regards to energy, Japan has been working to stabilise the international energy market by encouraging oil-producing countries to increase production and by cooperating with the International Energy Agency (IEA) and other international organisations. In addition, in the energy transition toward decarbonisation, Japan has been leading international discussions at the G20 and other forums by advocating that various paths should be pursued according to the circumstances of each country and that we would be actively involved in aiding emerging and developing countries through financial support and human resource development. Of course,

natural gas is a very important energy and we look forward to the contribution by Malaysia which is one of the largest LNG suppliers in Asia.

Next year, Japan will chair the G7 and we will endeavor to continue to lead the international community's contribution towards ensuring energy and food security.

4. Both countries will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Japan-ASEAN Friendship and Cooperation next year. ASEAN, including Malaysia, view Japan as an important partner in all spheres. Will Japan be rolling out any specific programmes in order to further promote exchanges among others in the field of renewables and green technology – key elements for tackling climate change?

Japan has a long-standing relationship with ASEAN and is not only a close business partner but also a true friend with a heart-to-heart relationship. Over the past half-century, we have enhanced cooperation in the areas of politics, security, economics, society and culture in the region as well as contributed to regional peace, stability and prosperity.

In terms of climate change countermeasures, Japan announced the "ASEAN-Japan Climate Change Action Agenda 2.0" at the Japan-ASEAN Summit Meeting in October last year. In the announcement, Japan expressed its commitment to promote cooperation with ASEAN countries through capacity building and sharing of technical know-how in order to achieve carbon neutrality.

We will also provide comprehensive support to ASEAN countries through the formulation of roadmaps for energy transition, technical cooperation and human resource development including the "Asian Energy Transition Initiative (AETI)". Japan is in the process of launching the "Asia Zero Emission Community" vision to promote such support and work toward decarbonisation and resilience while facing the various realities in each country.

We would like to further deepen our cooperation with ASEAN as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation next year.

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