

# Japanese PM vows 'maximum assistance' to PH infra dev't

By **Madel Sabater-Namit**

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the Japanese government will be pouring in "maximum assistance" to infrastructure development in the Philippines.

Abe is expected to arrive tonight for his official visit to the Philippines. This will be the first official visit of a Japanese Prime Minister to the country in the last six and a half years.

In an exclusive interview with the Manila Bulletin, Abe said the Philippines continues to be one of its strongest partners in the region and the Japanese would like to assist the Philippines in further improving its economy by pouring in "maximum assistance" in the area of infrastructure development.

He said the Philippine government's "remarkable" economic growth in the present Aquino administration paves the way for more investments from Japan.

"Japan will continue to provide its maximum assistance in such areas as the infrastructure development in metropolitan cities including transportation and traffic infrastructure, as well as disaster response," Abe said.

He noted that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been assisting the Philippine government in the development of a roadmap for improvement of transportation and traffic infrastructure for Metro Manila.

Abe cited that the Philippines' 7.8 percent economic growth in the first quarter is "remarkable" and that Japan would want to assist the Philippines in further attracting investments in the country.

"I think there are issues that need to be addressed in the Philippines to further attract investment, including the improvement of physical and institutional infrastructure. By assisting in the Philippines' efforts to address these issues,

Japan intends to continue to support the economic development of the Philippines," Abe said.

He also said Japan and the Philippines can cooperate in infrastructure development as Japan has the capital and technology while the Philippines has a "young and brilliant labor force" and much demand in infrastructure development.

"This means that the two economies are mutually complementary," he said.

"The Philippines is rich in young, competent and English-speaking labor force. Also, labor disputes are not so prevalent in the country. Due to these advantages, I understand that the Philippines is becoming more and more attractive as an investment destination for Japanese enterprises," he added.

The Japanese Prime Minister also reaffirmed the strong ties between the Philippines and Japan, noting the strategic partnership between the two countries.

"I think it is necessary for Japan to cooperate with our vigorous partner, the Philippines, so we can prosper together. The areas where the two countries can cooperate are wide and various, from economics to politics, security, and people-to-people exchange," he said.

"In the areas of politics and security, Japan will continue to actively support the peace process in Mindanao, where the economic potential is high, as part of our efforts to promote peace and prosperity of Asia," he said.

Abe also said he wants to promote tourism between Japan and the Philippines as a means to connect the Filipinos and Japanese people.

Prime Minister Abe said he is promoting tourism as a way to further enhance people-to-people exchanges among Filipinos and Japanese.

He cited that last June, Mt. Fuji was registered as a World Heritage site.

"Mt. Fuji has attracted numerous people with its beauty and magnificence. Japan has a number of cultural heritage sites and is rich in nature. Japanese food has fascinated people all over the world," Abe said.

"It is my hope that many Filipinos will visit Japan and experience the various attractions of Japan," he added.

"I will also enhance exchange of youth, the bearers of the future of the bilateral relations," Abe said.

In his visit to the Philippines, Prime Minister Abe is expected to hold a bilateral meeting with President Benigno S. Aquino III to discuss bilateral cooperation and regional issues, and further advance the Strategic Partnership between the Philippines and Japan.

It was recalled that Prime Minister Abe visited the Philippines in December 2006 during his first term as the head of the Japanese Government.

Japan is the Philippines' top trade partner with total trade exceeding \$13 billion last year. It is also the number one provider of official development assistance (ODA) to the Philippines. Japan likewise remains as the Philippines' top export market for 2012.

Japan is also the second major source of approved investments with approved investments reaching P22.35 billion in the first half of 2012 alone and third source of tourist arrivals, wherein 375,248 Japanese tourist arrivals had been recorded between January to November 2012.

## **Japan will assist PH in maritime security**

By **Madel Sabater - Namit**

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Manila, Philippines -- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the Japanese government will continue to work with the Philippines in ensuring maritime protection and security in the region.

In an exclusive interview with the Manila Bulletin, Prime Minister Abe said Japan “hopes to work together with the Philippines, a neighboring state connected by the sea, to protect the ocean as free and open ‘public property.’”

Japan is one of two strategic partners of the Philippines, the other being the United States.

Prime Minister Abe, however, said the Japanese government has no intention to use Philippine military bases on a regular basis.

The Philippine government had earlier said it is studying the possibility of allowing its closest allies – the United States and Japan – to use its military bases if deemed necessary.

“Japan has no plan to use Philippine military bases on a regular basis. If any, there will be only temporary visits to Philippine ports during such exercise,” Abe said.

He, however, said the Japanese government will continue to enhance the Philippines’ capacity building in maritime security as well as maritime law enforcement, including anti-piracy measures and smuggling control, search and rescue, marine environment protection, oil pollution control, and training for navigational safety.

“I believe the assistance will contribute to the peace and stability of not only the Philippines but also the whole region,” Abe said.

Japan is also currently assisting the Philippine government, particularly the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), in the transfer of knowledge and technology from the Japan Coast Guard to PCG by dispatching experts and patrol vessels.

The Japanese Prime Minister is expected to arrive tonight for a two-day official visit to the country upon the invitation of President Benigno S. Aquino III.