**Japan-Malaysia Relations focusing on the 30th Anniversary of the Look East Policy**

**---Some Reflections of a former Japanese Ambassador--**

February 10, 2012

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Thank you for the kind introduction.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Before I begin my speech, please allow me to express our deep appreciation to the people and the government of Malaysia for their assistance, kind words of sympathy, and expression of

solidarity with the people and the government of Japan, at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake which took place in March last year.

1. First of all, I have to explain why I am standing here. When I was working in Malaysia as Ambassador in the late 1990’s, there happened to be a few Japanese businessmen working here as heads of Japanese companies who were born in the same year with me, 1940, which is the year of “dragon”. We formed a group called “dragon-kai” and regularly met and played golf. This year is the year of “dragon”, and this group decided to get together in Kuala Lumpur on the occasion of the 6th round of the year of the dragon.

　Incidentally I had a long standing commitment with Professor Nasrudin of University Malaya that I deliver a speech or a lecture when I have a chance to visit Kuala Lumpur. 　This commitment materialized because I had a special connection with him and with the University of Malaya.

From 1996 to 1971 I was appointed as a Visiting Professor of the University of Malaya and delivered lectures on the subject “ Japan’s Foreign Policy after the end of the War in the Pacific “, and Professor Nasrudin gave me essential guidance about my work as a Visiting Professor.

On the occasion of appointment as Visiting Professor, the University gave me an opportunity to deliver a public lecture in the University. In October 1996, I made a speech under the title “ Japan and Malaysia toward the 21st century---projecting our partnership into the future---“.

Reading the text of the speech again, I realize that I made rather bold remarks about the relations between Japan and Malaysia. I said that our bilateral relations should not be pursued in the narrow context of the bilateral relations, but should be widened and deepened so that our two countries could cooperate and contribute to the benefits of

various countries of the world. I even said that we have a lot to do in the areas of politics, environment and human resources development.

After leaving Malaysia in 1999, I served as Ambassador in Okinawa, Germany and Russia. I retired from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006 and worked for Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Princess of Japan until last summer .

For any Ambassador who served in several countries, the country of the first Ambassadorship is the country of the strongest personal attachment. 　My personal attachment to Malaysia has become unshakable when I had the honour of being decorated as Datuk P.J.N. ( Panglima Jasa Negara) by the Malaysian Government in February 2006.

I have always kept interest in the situations of Malaysia and this region. Professor Nasrudin has been kind enough to keep close contact with me, and I encouraged him to strengthen Japan study unit at the University of Malaya.

1. Well, this time in order to prepare for today’s speech, I had to go through many documents and to seek advices and opinions from my colleagues and friends, including Professor Nasrudin. In doing so, I am delighted to find out that the country of Malaysia has been steadily and successfully developing to achieve the goal of Vision 2020, and the relations between Japan and Malaysia have developed and deepened far more than I expected in 1996. Just look at Per Capita National Income. It was around US$ 3,500 in the second half of 1990’s when I was Ambassador, and now it is US$ 8,423 in 2010. This is not the figure of developing country at all.

Our bilateral relations today are clearly and convincingly expressed in Japan-Malaysia Joint Leaders’ Statement “Enhanced Partnership for a New Frontier” which was issued at the time of the official visit of Dato’ Sri Mohd Najib, Prime minister of Malaysia to Japan in April 2010. According to this document, we are determined to develop our cooperation with four main pillars; cooperation for peace and security, cooperation for strengthening competitiveness and sustainable growth, cooperation for contribution in the area of environment and energy, and cooperation for human resources development and promotion of people-to-people exchanges. As a former diplomat who served here as Japanese Ambassador 15 years ago, I am deeply impressed by the level of widening and deepening of our bilateral relations.

1. Now, I should like to highlight two areas in which I was most impressed.
2. The first areas in which I was most impressed are the areas of politics and environment.

Economic and business relations have been the main pillar of our bilateral relations for many years. Therefore, developments in this area such as conclusion of Economic Partnership Agreement and strengthening of regional cooperation, while remarkable achievements indeed, were, for me, more or less anticipated.

Because of our strong economic relations we expected similarly strong development in the area of politics, which I must admit, was rather weak and modest.

Now I am pleased to learn that Japan has been cooperating with Malaysia in the training of the United Nations peace keepers at Port Dickson. I hope that we expand further cooperation in this area. Our cooperation in the Mindanao Peace Process has been quite remarkable. Our cooperation in the fight against terrorism and piracy is also quite impressive.

I like the way “ Japan Malaysia Cooperation Initiative for Environment and Energy” was announced. It expresses concrete measures to be taken by both sides in explicit manner. I hope that these measures will be materialized. I am glad to learn that Japanese companies are cooperating in the low-carbon city and smart community projects of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.

1. The second area in which I was most impressed is human resources development, smooth and successful evolution of the Look East Policy, in particular.

I strongly felt that 6 years to graduate from Japanese university (2 years for preparatory education and 4 years in Japanese university) are excessive burden to the Look East students. I remember that I did propose to cut short the whole period by one year by making preparatory education in Malaysia cover the first year education in Japanese university. It seems that this idea was adopted in the Malaysia Higher Education Loan Fund Project (HELP).

Using the arrangement of twinning program with Japanese universities (now, as many as 15 Japanese universities join this arrangement), Malaysian students can graduate from Japanese university in 5 years (3 years in Malaysia plus 2 years in Japan).

In my view this is such a remarkable evolution of the Look East Policy. I should like to pay high regards to every person who worked for this Project.

I admire the opening of Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIIT). This idea was proposed by the initiator of the Look East Policy, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in 2001.

The idea can be understood as the ultimate goal of the Look East Policy, because it aims at obtaining the level of education as high as in Japan without sending students to Japanese universities.

Taking into account big differences in the educational systems of both countries, it must have been quite difficult to reach agreement among the parties concerned on both sides. I express high respect to all those persons engaged in the establishment of MJIIT.

It is an Institute within the University of Technology Malaysia (UTM). It is a brand new establishment which opened in September last year. I understand that in the first year the number of students is 65 undergraduates and 34 postgraduates . The number of teaching staff is 37, including 4 Japanese. MJIIT aims at becoming the leading institute of this region. Within 7 years it hopes to have as many as 2,700 students, including students from neighbouring ASEAN and other countries.

The Look East Policy covers not only the area of higher education, but also vocational education and training. In this connection, my admiration goes to the success story of Japan Malaysia Technical Institute (JMTI).

JMTI was established in 1998 in Penang to cope with the needs of the industry for experts who can manipulate hi-tech instruments. I hear that JMTI has very high reputation and the number of applicants exceeds the capacity of the Institute.,

I remember very well that in July ,1998, I attended as Ambassador, the stone-laying and ground breaking ceremony of JMTI at Bukit Minyak, Penang.

4 Speaking about the Look East Policy, this year is the 30th Anniversary of the Look East Policy, and I was asked by several persons to refer to and to comment on it in my speech. I am more than happy to do so, but at the same time I know I must be careful. I should confine myself to speak only some reflections or observations as a former Japanese Ambassador.

1. First of all, I express high respect to the Malaysian government for continuously attaching importance to the human resources development. Indeed, nation building cannot be done without human resources development. I have a strong feeling that the evolution process of the Look East Policy is on the right track, and I sincerely hope further success of this process.
2. I must admit that I used to have an uneasy feeling to the words “ Look East”, even when I was Ambassador here. Maybe in the first 10 years or so of the Look East Policy, the words “Look East” would have sounded natural. But, after the successful implementation of the Policy and remarkable development of the nation building in Malaysia, I thought that we should look at both directions. In another words, Japan should look at Malaysia.

I made this point clear already in my public lecture of 1996 at the University of Malaya. I have now much stronger feeling after learning that the arrangement of twinning program has become possible between Japanese and Malaysian universities.

There are tremendous merits for Japanese students to spend their 2nd or 3rd year of university life in Malaysian university, taking advantage of this arrangement. Malaysia is the success model of a multi-racial and multi-religious society. I wish that Japanese youth will experience this success model.

1. Concept of JMTI and MJIIT is to achieve the purpose of the Look East Policy without sending students to Japan.

Scope of the study at JMTI is vocational and specialized to technical matters, and with the participation of real Japanese experts in the training and pragmatic assistance from

Japanese companies operating in Malaysia, I think that quality of vocational education at JMTI can be almost the same as in Japan.

1. In the case of MJIIT it has just started and may take some time before the teaching staff and facilities will function as planned. There may be initial problems to solve, but as I said , MJIIT has excellent visions for the future in the long term perspective. I am sure that MJIIT can overcome those problems, whatever they might be. I am expecting to see the success of MJIIT.
2. During my Ambassadorship here for 3 and a half years from 1995 to 1999, there was an important occasion in which I always looked forward to attend. The occasion was the send-off party of those students who completed 2 years of preparatory education in Malaysia,

One scene is firmly engraved on my memory and I can vividly recall it even now. It was the glittering eyes of all the students. Looking at those glittering eyes or glow of eyes, I was firmly convinced that they all would come back from Japan after accomplishing their purpose.

I found the text of my speech at one send-off party. Reading it now, I realize that I was very patriotic not only to Japan but also to Malaysia. I talked as if I were talking to my sons and daughters.

Please allow me to quote some of my words.

“,,,,when you go to Japanese university, study hard! When I say “study hard”, I mean that you study in the morning, in the afternoon, and if necessary in the evening and at night. In our life there are some years when you are obliged to do nothing but study. Don’t say you cannot do it. If you have a specific purpose for your study, you can do it. Your purpose is to contribute to nation building of Malaysia. The country of Malaysia needs you, and you have to respond to the need of your country. When I went abroad for the study in the early 1960’s, Japan was still a developing country, and the need for the country was to study and work hard to catch up with the Americans and the Europeans. I always had a specific purpose. It was to contribute to the need of my country. I studied really hard. Now 30 years afterwards I recall that I did the right thing at the right time. Your hard study in Japan will bring about a lot of credits and rewards in the future, not in the immediate future may be, but in your life time, it will certainly remain as a great asset. You are the valuable asset not only for Malaysia, but also for Japan and Japan-Malaysia relations. “”

There was one critical moment for the continuation of the Look East Policy.. It was the time of financial crisis in Asia in 1998.

Malaysian government informed Japanese government that there were no financial resources to send new Look East students for that year. I thought that it was indeed an extraordinary situation in Malaysia. No doubt, for those students who finished preparatory course and were waiting to go to Japanese universities, this was a terrible disappointment.

Never before this time had I negotiated more strongly with my home government.

It was such a relief to me and to my Malaysian friends that Japanese government decided to bear the whole expenses necessary for the dispatch of all Malaysian students who finished preparatory education, provided that Malaysian government would bear the expenses necessary for them to continue their study in Japan from the next year onward.

1. Thanks to the Look East Policy, number of Malaysian students who studied in Japanese universities has become around 6,000, and the number of Malaysians dispatched to Japan for training is around 8,000. They are now playing important roles in Malaysian society.

From Japanese side, as I said, I really wish to see more Japanese students to come to Malaysia. But in terms of our bilateral relations as a whole, I see an encouraging aspect in the fact that overwhelming majority of those Japanese businessmen, government officials, scholars and others who spent several years in Malaysia go home as big fans of Malaysia and wish to continue positive association with Malaysia, such as spending post retirement period in Malaysia.

If we continue and expand people-to-people contact, just as we have been doing till now, no doubt we can develop further and enjoy excellent relations in the future.

Well, with those positive and optimistic words on our bilateral relations I conclude my speech. Thank you for your attention.

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