

## 【Introduction】

1. Good afternoon everyone. Selamat Petang semua, apa khabar? Nama saya Oka Hiroshi, Ambassador of Japan to Malaysia. It is a great honor for me to be given an opportunity to speak at this prestigious forum online. I would like to congratulate Professor Datuk Dr. Wahid Omar, Vice Chancellor of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) on his leadership to develop this ATU-NET. My profound gratitude also goes out to the participating presidents of universities across 40 countries. I believe this forum provides a unique and valuable platform for academic leaders to exchange knowledge and expertise on many matters of mutual interest.

## 【COVID-19】

2. Now let me start with COVID-19. Witnessing the situations unfolding here in Malaysia, I would like to pay my respect to the government and people of Malaysia for their success in stabilizing the situations. Fatality rate and reproductive rate are both low in Malaysia. It is the effective and transparent measures by the government, as well as the unity and self-discipline of the people that have contributed to this globally recognized achievement.
3. The situations in Japan have also been stabilizing. State of emergency enforced in April was fully lifted at the end of May. Instead of resorting to stringent measures such as lock down, behavior changes of the people had contributed to the stabilisation in Japan. The government has advised people to avoid the 3Cs: closed space, crowded area and close conversation. Avoiding 3Cs are now being practiced worldwide. In Japan, the number of deaths per 1 million people have been kept at a relatively low level of 7. However, we must not be complacent and continue to be vigilant.
4. Regional and global cooperation is vital in overcoming infectious diseases including COVID-19. From this standpoint, Prime Minister Abe of Japan announced his full support on the proposal to establishing ASEAN infectious disease centre put forward by ASEAN. I hope that the ASEAN+3 summit to take place in November will agree on the basics of the Centre based on the feasibility study which is underway.
5. To support international cooperation to speed up the development and manufacture of medicines and vaccines for COVID-19, Japan joined in April the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) accelerator, an international framework led by World Health Organization (WHO). Japan contributed GAVI and CEPI within this international framework. We fully support the statement by Malaysian Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin that affordability and accessibility to vaccine for all is crucial to end the pandemic.

6. We have yet to know how different the “New Normal” will be from the “Old Normal”. Development of vaccines and medicines may discover ways for us to adapt to our “New Normal” in the post COVID-19 recovery phase.
7. Allow me to share with you some of the ongoing efforts in Japan based on Industry-academia-government collaboration for developing medicines and vaccines to overcome COVID-19.
  - (1) Medicine:

The Institute of Medical Science of University of Tokyo has identified an existing drug, Nafamostat by Fusan brand, originally developed in Japan to treat pancreatitis, is expected to prevent COVID-19 at its early stage. Clinical trials have begun testing for this drug.
  - (2) Vaccine:

Osaka University and Angene, a venture company originating from Osaka University, have begun the first clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine in June.
  - (3) Supercomputers for COVID-19 research:

The supercomputer Fugaku, which has the world’s fastest calculating speed, is currently being installed in Kobe, under a RIKEN-led project. Fugaku will be utilised to the fullest extent for COVID-19 related researches.
8. As we have unexpectedly discovered the usefulness of gizmos for tele-conference, as we are experiencing today, our lives will no longer be the same. COVID-19 is a challenge for humans, but it has also provided us catalyst for socio-economic changes as we adapt to new applications of digital technologies.

#### 【COVID 19 and EDUCATION】

9. Education would perhaps be one of the areas most affected by COVID-19. Schools are closed and scholarship students are not able to travel abroad or return to their home country due to strict cross border movement.
10. In Japan, school year starts in April and, while nearly 90 percent of universities had to postpone their regular spring semester, almost all universities have begun their classes, as of June 1<sup>st</sup>. In doing so, 90 percent of universities are also utilising online or distance classes. Similar situations are found for schools, where 98 percent have already resumed their classes, including those in the form of shortened school hours or alternative attendance.

11. One of the findings of distance learning experience shows that, students in Japan do not all have access to high speed fiber internet connection. That was one of the major challenges to execute the distance learning in Japan. The government is now working diligently to put in place an appropriate IT environment, including by ensuring each student has an access to IT terminal. This will enable schools and universities to provide advanced education by conducting distance classes with the help of digitalisation.

**【Internalisation of Education】**

12. Now, let me speak about the efforts to internationalise higher education in Japan. Universities, which is integral for human resource development, are putting efforts to attract foreign students to enroll by internationalising the education system and research environment.

13. In Japan for instance, we are aiming to achieve: (1) 300,000 international students studying in Japan, (2) 120,000 Japanese students studying abroad, and (3) 10 Japanese universities among the top 100 in the world.

And as of recent, results show:

(1) In 2019, more than 300,000 International students are studying in Japan. This is more than double the number in 2009, with more than 90 percent students are from Asia.

(2) Japanese students studying abroad are also increasing every year, with 115,000 in 2018, although many of them are for short term study courses.

(3) Based on the QS World University Rankings 2020, there are 10 Japanese universities among the top 200 in the world, but only 5 Japanese universities are among the top 100. As such, there is a need to increase the global reputation of Japanese universities.

14. To enhance the reputation of Japanese universities, efforts have been initiated to identify and develop what we call “hub universities” with an educational environment that are at par with other countries. For this purpose, support is extended to those universities which use English as a medium throughout the courses or proactively recruit international faculty and younger talents who have acquired qualifications from top well-known universities. Developing overseas bases to promote diversity on campus is encouraged.

15. To develop these “Hub Universities”, Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has identified 37 universities and allocated a 10-year special budget to help internationalise these universities. They are categorised into two groups, 13 universities with the aim to rank among the top 100 in the world, whilst 24 universities pioneering in trial runs based on their performance.

#### 【International Academic Cooperation】

16. It is not only the global ranking that governs the academic world today. Global issues such as poverty, infectious diseases, and environmental conflicts are all ever more challenging and it is our duty to address these issues. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for an international cooperation to overcome these trials together. Japan, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nobel Prize winner in natural sciences in this century, will make use of its knowledge in science and technologies for the benefit of humankind.
17. We are promoting two types of international joint research projects. Some examples include:
- (1) The Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development (SATREPS) is a Japanese government program that promotes international joint research. Based on the needs of developing countries, each research project aims to address any global issue and lead a research to provide practical benefit for society. A total of 157 international joint research projects from 52 countries have been selected for this program since 2008. For example, Saga University, UTM and 6 other institutions led a project which conducts a demonstration of an innovative hybrid ocean thermal energy conversion system (H-OTEC) in Malaysia, a nation with great potential for ocean thermal energy conversion.
  - (2) The Strategic International Collaborative Research Program (SICORP) is a Japanese government program that promotes international joint research through collaboration with a range of countries, based on inter-governmental agreements. For example, Kyoto University is promoting a joint research for a sustainable development to solve common issues in ASEAN countries. This SICORP project is joined by National Science and Technology Development Agency Thailand, Indonesian Institute of Sciences and MJIIT of Malaysia.

#### 【Academic collaboration between Japan and Malaysia】

18. Finally, allow me to briefly touch on the academic cooperation between Japan and Malaysia. Since the Look East Policy in 1981, more than 17,000 Malaysians have studied in Japan and they are now playing leading roles in various fields in Malaysia. Their presence gives unique strength to the partnership between Japan and Malaysia. Next year marks the 40th anniversary of Look East Policy and we look forward to celebrating this achievement.

19. Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIT) was established in 2011 as a faculty under UTM as government-to-government cooperation project between Malaysia and Japan. MJIT symbolizes the long-lasting bilateral cooperation under the Look East Policy. Nine Japanese professors together with a hundred faculty members are teaching at MJIT over 1000 local and foreign students both undergraduate and postgraduate level. MJIT has even contributed to contain the spread of COVID-19. Some of the graduates acquiring Master degree led the process of developing SOPs and setting up quarantine stations for the country. Face-shields manufactured by the state of the art 3-D printers in MJIT were distributed to protect frontline medical officers.
20. University of Tsukuba, a leading university in Japan with 3 Nobel Prize winners, has expressed their intention in opening its branch campus in Malaysia which will be the first ever overseas branch campus of Japanese university. This reflects the favorable international academic environment permeating in Malaysia.

【Closing】

21. My hope is for the academic cooperation to gradually resume very soon. Under such circumstances, this forum in which universities from many countries participate is a great opportunity to create a new collaboration. I hope everyone will have a very fruitful time in this forum today and I wish further success to ATU-NET.

Thank you. ありがとうございます