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Japan, Malaysia expand cooperation beyond bilateral relations, says ex-PM Abe



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By Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, March 11 -- The scope of Japan-Malaysia cooperation is being extended beyond bilateral relations towards working for peace and prosperity in the region and the world, said former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Abe said that in welcoming the widening of the bilateral ties, Japan was determined to continue to work hand in hand with Malaysia to maintain and strengthen the free and open international order.



"Japan and Malaysia, as strategic partners sharing strategic interests and fundamental values such as democracy and the rule of law, continue to broaden their scope of cooperation beyond economic and social fields," he told Bernama in a written interview ahead of his arrival here last night for a three-day official visit as the special envoy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Going forward, Abe said, it would be meaningful for both countries to further promote security and maritime safety cooperation 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)' in order to secure peace and prosperity in the region and the international community.

He said the Indo-Pacific region, where Japan and Malaysia are located, was facing serious challenges to its free and open international order based on the rule of law from attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force and economic coercion.

"Both Japan and Malaysia are democracies, trading countries and maritime nations. The existing international order, not the rule of force, is nothing less than a catalyst that enables the two countries to develop. I am convinced that maintaining and strengthening this order will bring peace and prosperity to the region," he said.

Abe, who was prime minister twice - for a period totalling nine years - and the longest-serving head of government in Japanese history, pointed out that Japan was promoting FOIP and would actively cooperate with its partners including Malaysia, which he described as "our running mate", to realise the AOIP that shared many fundamental principles.

He cited as an example the enhancement of the rule of law at sea where Japan had supported capacity building of Malaysian coast guard officers since the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency was established in 2005.

"The coast guard officers benefited from this assistance and now serve as instructors to provide training to third countries. I am confident that Japan will continue to work with Malaysia in this field.

"Japan is paying attention to the Sulu-Celebes Seas, as key sea lanes, to realise FOIP. Japan, in coordination with the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), is willing to reinforce our cooperation in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and its surrounding areas, which are economically and socially vulnerable, (and) frequently subject to acts of piracy, terrorist attacks and natural disasters," he said.

Abe's visit to Malaysia coincides with the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Malaysia and the 40th anniversary of Malaysia's Japan-centric 'Look East Policy' of emulating Japanese work ethics and managerial systems to improve the economic performance and productivity of Malaysia.

"I am making my first visit in seven years to Malaysia, as a special envoy of the Prime Minister. I visited Malaysia three times as the Prime Minister of Japan, and each time I had been amazed and astonished by its remarkable economic growth," he said.

Japan and Malaysia enjoy a close economic and strategic partnership, boosted by about 1,500 Japanese companies operating in Malaysia.

Abe said that besides providing assistance for the COVID-19 response by the Malaysian government, Japan also supports smart city projects in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and Kuching aimed at enhancing the efficiency and sophistication of regional functions and services.

In addition, Japan supports Malaysia's development of communications infrastructure to adapt to the digitalisation of society and its energy transition towards a decarbonised society.

Describing the Look East Policy initiated by then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the foundation for such cordial bilateral relations, Abe said that under this policy, more than 26,000 young Malaysians had studied and trained in Japan, acquiring not only advanced skills and knowledge but also Japanese values such as work ethics, enthusiasm for learning and working, as well as morals.

"I am proud that people with such ties to Japan are playing important roles in various fields in Malaysia, serving as an unshakeable bridge connecting our two countries," he said.

Japan has also extended a range of cooperation to enhance the learning environment in Malaysia, supporting the construction of new educational facilities and sending over some 800 faculty and Japanese language instructors.

The Japanese government is also supporting the University of Tsukuba's opening of a branch campus in Malaysia, the first foreign campus of a Japanese university, to enable Malaysians to receive Japanese-style education within the country itself.

"I would like to take this opportunity to ask the younger generation and the rest of the Malaysian people to spur Japan-Malaysia relations, which have vast potentials," said Abe.

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