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Japan to enhance cooperation with Malaysia in maintaining peace, regional stability - PM Kishida

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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said with his country's efforts through a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), strengthening the order will bring about peace, stability and prosperity. - AFP Pic

KUALA LUMPUR: Against the backdrop of escalating regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear developments and unilateral attempts to alter the status quo in the East and South China Seas, Japan wants to further cooperate with Malaysia in maintaining and enhancing maritime connectivity and stability in the region.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said with his country's efforts through a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), strengthening the order will bring about peace, stability and prosperity not only for our two countries but also for the entire international community.

"The new plan for FOIP, which I announced in March this year, inherits the original vision of 'freedom', 'the rule of law', 'inclusiveness', 'openness' and 'diversity', and at the same time, puts emphasis on leading the international community in the direction of cooperation rather than division and confrontation.

"Through rule-making based on 'dialogue', 'equal partnership' among nations, and approaches focusing on the people, Japan aims to ensure that freedom and the rule of law are respected, and that various nations coexist and prosper together in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Japan also strongly supports mainstreaming the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which shares fundamental principles with FOIP. While promoting such efforts,

Japan will further cooperate with Malaysia, which is located at an important sea lane connecting the Indian and the Pacific Oceans."

Kishida told BERNAMA's Foreign News Service in a written interview in conjunction with his inaugural two-day visit to Malaysia from Nov 4-5, in light of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation this year, themed "Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities".

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

Japan was the first country in the world to partner with ASEAN when they established their relationship in 1973.The ties were cemented with the First ASEAN-Japan Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in 1977 and continues to be built on trust, respect and commitment ever since.

The following is the full text of the written interview with Kishida:

Question: How do you see the current state of Malaysia-Japan relations and what are your key priorities for further strengthening the bilateral ties?

Answer: Let me firstly say how I am pleased to visit Malaysia as Prime Minister of Japan in a timely manner as we celebrated the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Malaysia, and the 40th anniversary of the Look East Policy last year, and the 50th year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation this year.

Together, Japan and Malaysia have been building a longstanding and excellent relationship.

Now, more than ever, as the international community currently faces multiple crises, Japan and Malaysia, as strategic partners sharing fundamental values and principles, need to cooperate to maintain and enhance a free and open international order based on the rule of law as well as to ensure a world in which "human dignity" is protected.

Our two countries also have great potential to expand the scope of cooperation in such areas as the economy, security, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and in addressing regional and global challenge.

More concretely, we would like to further build up cooperation in a wide range of areas including supply chain resilience and digital and green industries of which Malaysia attaches great importance.

Let me also touch upon the plan to establish a branch campus in Malaysia by the University of Tsukuba, one of leading national universities of Japan. This is a new

development under the Look East Policy. Preparations are underway to open the branch campus in September next year.

I hope that it 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 play active roles in various fields. I earnestly hope that many Malaysians will study at Tsukuba's branch campus and become a bridge to further develop Japan-Malaysia relations in the future.

Question: Given the economic challenges posed by the global landscape, how can Japan and Malaysia enhance economic collaboration to promote innovation and trade between the two nations?

Answer: Both Japan and Malaysia are contracting parties of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Through these economic partnership agreements, Japan and Malaysia are working together to promote economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, both Japan and Malaysia are participating in negotiations regarding the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), and Supply Chain Agreement Negotiations reached the substantial conclusion in May of this year.

In addition to supply chain resilience, which is an important common issue for our two countries, Japan will closely collaborate with Malaysia and other regional partners to produce tangible results early on as well as ensuring prosperity by establishing a regional economic order.

Malaysia has been producing many talents who are familiar with the language, culture and tradition of both Japan and Malaysia through the Look East Policy, which was initiated in 1982.

This is a huge advantage for Japan and Malaysia to enhance their economic relations. Many Japanese companies were attracted by this background and invested in Malaysia, thus contributing to Malaysia's economic development.

Currently, more than 1600 Japanese companies are operating in Malaysia in business sectors which are not only limited to manufacturing, but have also expanded into the service and retail sectors.

As Japan faces globalisation, there are many things that Japan can take in from Malaysia. Cultural diversity as well as Islamic finance and the Halal industry are areas in which Malaysia has the advantage.

By learning from Malaysia in these areas, Japan looks forward to expanding its business opportunities. Japan would like to expand its market to the Islamic and ASEAN nations through Malaysia.

Question: In light of recent regional developments, how do you see Japan and Malaysia collaborating on issues of regional security and stability, including but not limited to maritime security and the South China Sea? What role do you believe Malaysia plays in Japan's "Free and Open Indo Pacific"?

Answer: The regional security environment has been becoming increasingly severe, given North Korea's nuclear and missile development and unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

At the G7 Hiroshima Summit, the G7 leaders sent out to international partners beyond the G7 a strong message to uphold a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

Maintaining and strengthening this very order will bring about peace, stability and prosperity not only for our two countries but also for the entire international community. With this in mind, Japan is promoting efforts to realise a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)".

The new plan for FOIP, which I announced in March this year, inherits the original vision of "freedom", "the rule of law", "inclusiveness", "openness" and "diversity", and at the same time, puts emphasis on leading the international community in the direction of cooperation rather than division and confrontation.

Through rule-making based on "dialogue", "equal partnership" among nations, and approaches focusing on the "people", Japan aims to ensure that freedom and the rule of law are respected, and that various nations coexist and prosper together in the Indo-Pacific region.

At the same time, Japan strongly supports mainstreaming the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)", which shares fundamental principles with FOIP. Japan continues to make efforts in order for many countries to appreciate the principles of AOIP and to extend their support.

While promoting such efforts, Japan will further cooperate with Malaysia, which is located on an important sea lane connecting the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, in maintaining and enhancing maritime connectivity and stability in this region.

The two patrol vessels Japan provided to the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) in 2016 are conducting operations to protect the waters surrounding Malaysia today. Furthermore, Japan has been providing support for capacity building of MMEA officers since the establishment of the MMEA in 2005.

Currently, Japan and Malaysia are providing training to third countries in the field of maritime security with officers of Japan Coast Guard and MMEA serving as instructors.In order to realise FOIP and AOIP, Japan would like to continue to enhance collaboration with our strategic partner Malaysia.

Question: Climate change and sustainability are global concerns. How can Japan and Malaysia work together to address environmental challenges, promote sustainable development, and achieve common goals in the fight against climate change?

Answer: In January of last year, I announced the "Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC)" concept with a view to contributing to Asia's decarbonisation with Japan's technology and systems. The purpose of this concept is to realise a realistic energy transition in accordance with the current situation in Asia, by attracting investment capital and shaping actual projects to achieve decarbonisation.

Malaysia was among the first to support this concept. The AZEC Summit Meeting is planned to be held during the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in December. I would like to exchange views towards Asia's decarbonisation with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar and other leaders participating in this initiative. - Bernama