

MALAYSIA (ANALYSIS)

KUALA LUMPUR, OCT. 9 (BERNAMA-KYODO) - MALAYSIA'S MUCH-HERALDED "LOOK EAST" POLICY OF EMULATING JAPAN HAS GONE SOUR.

INSTEAD OF BEING A MODEL, JAPAN HAS INCREASINGLY BECOME A TARGET OF CRITICISM IN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS CIRCLES HERE AS THE SOURCES OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WIDEN IN AREAS SUCH AS TRADE AND CIVIL AVIATION.

THE CONCEPT OF "LOOK EAST," FIRST ADVOCATED BY PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TWO YEARS AGO, WILL FACE THE ACID TEST WHEN MAHATHIR FLIES TO TOKYO LATER THIS WEEK ON HIS WAY BACK HOME FROM NEW YORK,

THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO HAS TRAVELLED FREQUENTLY TO JAPAN, WILL CONFRONT JAPANESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN A BAROMETER GAUGE HOW FAR THE JAPANESE ARE TAKING WHAT MALAYSIA HAS SEEN AS A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP.

MALAYSIA'S GROWING DISCONTENT ERUPTED LAST AUGUST WHEN MAHATHIR POINTEDLY BOYCOTTED AN OFFICIAL JAPAN-MALAYSIA FORUM FOR THE STUDY OF BILATERAL RELATIONS.

MAHATHIR'S ABSENCE WAS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE HE HAD PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN ORGANIZING THE MEETING, THE FIRST TO BE SPONSORED JOINTLY BY JAPAN'S FOREIGN MINISTRY AND MALAYSIA'S INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES.

INDEED, MAHATHIR DID MORE THAN SIMPLY SKIP THE FORUM. IN HIS OPENING SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY, RAZALEIGH HAMZAH, THE PRIME MINISTER MADE A SCATHING ATTACK ON JAPAN. HE CRITICIZED THE JAPANESE ECONOMY AS EXTREMELY PROTECTIONIST, AND DESCRIBED JAPAN'S ECONOMIC TIES WITH MALAYSIA AS "COLONIALIST."

UNHAPPY WITH WHAT HE CALLED JAPAN'S FOOT-DRAGGING IN TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION, MAHATHIR POINTEDLY ASKED WHETHER THE JAPANESE REALLY WANT TO HELP MALAYSIA WITH ITS MODERNIZATION EFFORTS.

MAHATHIR CAPPED HIS EXPRESSION OF FRUSTRATION WITH JAPAN BY REMINDING HIS AUDIENCE THAT HIS "LOOK EAST" POLICY WAS NOT MEANT TO TURN JAPAN INTO AN ARROGANT AND INSENSITIVE NATION.

APART FROM TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION, MAHATHIR WAS ALSO UNHAPPY ABOUT JAPAN'S TRADE POLICY.

JAPAN FLOODS MALAYSIA WITH MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS, WHILE JAPANESE IMPORTS FROM MALAYSIA ARE MAINLY PRIMARY PRODUCTS LIKE TIMBER AND PETROLEUM, HE SAID.

MAHATHIR NOTED THAT MALAYSIA'S ACCUMULATED TRADE DEFICIT WITH JAPAN HAS SOARED FROM 750 MILLION DOLLARS IN 1980 TO 2 BILLION DOLLARS THIS YEAR, AND DEMANDED THAT TOKYO MAKE ITS MARKETS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO MALAYSIAN PRODUCTS.

MOREOVER, THE SMALL BUSINESSMAN IN MALAYSIA HAS ALSO BEEN UNNERVED BY THE RECENT FLOOD OF JAPANESE INVESTMENT; WHICH HAS RANGED FROM JAPANESE RESTAURANTS TO SUPERMARKETS.

TO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THE LAST STRAW IN WHAT THEY SEE AS JAPANESE INSENSITIVITY WAS THE HARD LINE THE JAPANESE REPORTEDLY TOOK IN THE LATEST ROUND OF CIVIL AVIATION NEGOTIATIONS.

THE TALKS BROKE DOWN SHORTLY BEFORE THE MALAYSIA-JAPAN FORUM, AND THIS WAS SAID TO HAVE INTENSIFIED MAHATHIR'S FEELINGS ABOUT JAPAN. --BERNAMA-KYODO