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Aid for developing states on Hashimoto's KL agenda

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto who arrives tomorrow is expected to raise the issue of co-operation between Malaysia and Japan in helping other developing countries in the region attain faster growth.

Japanese Ambassador Issei Nomura said the tremendous growth achieved by Malaysia and its contribution towards economic development of other countries would make it an "excellent partner" for Japan in helping other developing nations.

"Co-operation between the two countries in accelerating growth in third countries will see the evolvement of a new dimension in the relations between Malaysia and Japan and further strengthen the strong bond that already exists," he said.

He said Hashimoto, who arrived in Brunei today, and will travel to Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore, is bringing part of his Tokyo based task force members monitoring the hostage crisis in Lima, Peru.

He said the personnel and special equipment would allow Hashimoto to constantly monitor the situation in Lima and, if necessary, communicate his decisions.

The hostage crisis began on Dec 17 when the left-wing Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement seized the official residence of Japanese Ambassador to Peru Morihisa Aoki during a reception to mark Emperor Akihito's birthday.

Nomura said although Hashimoto is concerned over the situation in Lima and wants a peaceful settlement, he also has to continue to undertake his many tasks including strengthening relations with Asean countries.

"The Japanese Prime Minister places great importance on Japan's ties with Asean and that is one of the main reasons why he decided to go ahead with this visit," he said.

Nomura added that since Malaysia holds the Asean chairmanship this year, Hashimoto and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, would discuss bilateral relations and also further strengthening of Asean-Japan ties.

He added that Japan would like joint meetings between heads of governments of Asean countries and Japan to be held more often especially since the last such meeting was held in 1987.

Replying to questions submitted by the New Straits Times to the Japanese Foreign Ministry in connection with Hashimoto's visit, a government spokesman said, the remarkable economic development in the Southeast Asian region and increasing role Asean is playing in the international arena, necessitates further strengthening of the good relations between Japan and Asean.

Since Hashimoto visited Thailand and the Philippines last year, the Japanese Prime Minister is visiting the remaining five Asean nations in a whirlwind tour to establish close personal relations with the leaders and discuss bilateral and multilateral issues.

The spokesman added that Japan was keen to assist Malaysia in attaining Vision 2020 goals and with 1,300 Japanese firms operating in Malaysia, transfer of technology and introduction of state-of-the-art processes can help propel the nation to industrialisation.

The spokesman said Hashimoto is also expected to brief Dr Mahathir on Japan's contribution towards confidence-building measures in the region and Tokyo's need to continue to have the Japan-US security arrangement

allowing American troop presence in the area.

He said Japan would continue to contribute ideas and arrange meetings so that contentious issues could be discussed over the negotiating table.

He said Japan would continue to play its role in the Asean Regional Forum, initiated in 1994 and hoped that more countries in the region would "publish their basic defence policy" to ensure there is openness and transparency in activities related to security.

On education and human resource development, Hashimoto is expected to call for closer co-operation between Malaysia and Tokyo so that more Malaysians can benefit from "Japan's experience" in the industrialisation process.

On the East Asia Economic Caucus, the spokesman said, it was most desirable that countries in the region continue to hold discussions on economic development and arrive at decisions which are for the "common good".

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