

07/11/1998

Tokyo supports KL's measures towards economic recovery

Adeline Ong in Tokyo

TOKYO, Fri: Japan remains supportive of Malaysia's measures to overcome the current economic situation and stresses the importance of political stability in the country, press secretary of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr Sadaaki Numata said today.

"We have made it clear that our Prime Minister will be going to Kuala Lumpur to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting."

He said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in Tokyo three weeks ago to attend the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, and on that occasion he and Prime Minister Obuchi had a chance to talk.

"Prime Minister Obuchi also mentioned that there seems to be considerable international concern about the internal situation in Malaysia and this is something that he was concerned about," Numata said at a weekly international press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here.

Numata was explaining Japan's stance when asked to comment on reports that Malaysia, and especially Dr Mahathir, needed "friends" during the current political scenario and with the Apec leaders' summit in Kuala Lumpur just around the corner.

"So, as friends, they talked candidly and freely. I expect this to continue to be the case when they have a chance to meet in Kuala Lumpur," Numata said.

Meanwhile, when asked on what is expected of the Apec leaders' summit, Numata said it was too early to talk about the specific outcome of the meet.

"The leaders, however, have been in the habit of issuing joint declarations. Last year, they came out with the Apec Economic Leaders' Declaration in Vancouver. Something similar may take place. It is up to the leaders to decide," he said.

Numata added that there are various issues that needed to be addressed by the leaders.

"One point is that this will be the second Apec leaders' meeting that will take place against the backdrop of Asian economic and financial crisis.

He added that Japan is braced to keep its tariffs on forest and marine products, despite anticipated pressure from the Apec forum.

"The point of voluntarism is very important in the Apec process and that is what we have been emphasising. When we talk about the early voluntary sectoral liberalisation (EVSL), we are talking about nine areas, which includes fishery and forestry.

"However, so much importance have been placed with respect with these two areas. There are three ways to approach the nine sectors - trade liberalisation, trade and investment facilitation and Ecotech.

"Three ways in nine sectors would mean 27 areas to look at. Therefore, to place so much of emphasis on two out of 27 ... well, they may not be striking the right balance.

"Fisheries and forestry products for Japan is very sensitive but we are by far the biggest importer in these sectors.

Forestry and marine products were chosen from 15 sectors for the EVSL initiatives in the Apec meeting as a way to stimulate economic activity among member nations.

The US and other nations have proposed that tariffs be lifted on timber and some lumber products by January 1 2002, and that duties on marine products be eliminated by late December 2005.

They have also proposed that non-tariff barriers such as import quotas be reduced within a specific period.

(END)