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Japan-Official

M'SIA AN IMPORTANT PARTNER FOR JAPAN, SAYS JAPANESE OFFICIAL

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 10 (Bernama) -- A senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official said Japan looks forward towards forging closer relations with Malaysia as Tokyo presents its new thinking on East Asia and seeks a more constructive role in the region.

Norio Hattori said given Malaysia's importance in Asean, Japan "absolutely needs" Kuala Lumpur's understanding and cooperation to realise its intention.

Furthermore, he said, Malaysia had a long-serving prime minister whose advice would be valuable as Japan undertook a new thinking regarding its policy towards the region.

"(Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) has been the prime minister of this country for the past 20 years, which is extraordinary. So it is quite natural for the Japanese prime minister to seek his wisdom," he said on the sidelines of the one-day visit of Junichiro Koizumi to Malaysia.

Hattori said Koizumi's proposal called for the creation of an East Asian community that would act and advance together.

"In order for us to pursue this path, we see Asean+3 as the very basis of this cooperation framework and we wish to build up such a cooperation in every possible field," he said.

Asean+3 refers to the grouping of 10 Southeast Asian countries - Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam - together with Japan, China and South Korea.

On another note, Hattori said Japan's ties with Malaysia had developed very fast and with much depth, thanks in part to the Look East Policy introduced here by Dr Mahathir some 20 years ago.

He also said that Japan would look into Malaysia's request for assistance regarding a water supply project.

Although he did not specify the project, it has been reported that a proposed water supply project from Pahang to Selangor and Kuala Lumpur would make use part of a loan offered by Japan to Malaysia.

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