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Feature-Japan-Policy

NEW IMPETUS TO MALAYSIA'S LOOK EAST POLICY

(1st of 2-Part Series)

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KUALA LUMPUR: After going through a successful and meaningful 20 years of implementation and close friendship, Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP) is set to expand into a much broader bilateral cooperation with new resolve and inputs from Japan.

Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad who set the policy in 1982 to direct his people to learn and emulate the Japanese and Koreans, made a special trip to Tokyo to mark the occasion and to inject new zeal, programmes and projects to add more meat to the policy.

In this, he struck a positive chord in his Japanese counterpart, Junichiro Koizumi, and the Japanese government.

For Japan, the 20th year denotes adulthood and the right time for both countries to assess the achievements and the significance of the policy and consider new ways on how future programmes should be carried out.

Undoubtedly, the policy had brought immense benefits to Malaysia, its people and corporate citizens alike.

Dr Mahathir said the policy had served as a framework of learning from the successful Japanese and Korean models, of adopting good values into the work culture of the Malaysian people.

The policy, he said, has contributed greatly to the economic and social developments of Malaysia.

Today, the vision of making Malaysia a developed country by the year 2020, is testimony of the policy and plan introduced by Dr Mahathir in inspiring for the Japanese way of development and progress.

TWO-WAY TRAFFIC

For the next two decades, as much as Japan wants to continue imparting its experiences in terms of discipline, commitment, positive attitude, loyalty to an organisation, skills and modern technologies, it is also looking forward to learn from Malaysia's experiences.

"For the next 20 years, Japan wants to learn Malaysia's experience, which Japan has not experienced," said a senior official of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an interview with Bernama.

Mio Maeda, Deputy Director of the Second Southeast Asia Division of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, said Japan was looking forward to gain knowledge from Malaysia, mainly on how it had successfully promoted the national integration policy.

Being a moderate Islamic country, he said Malaysia, which has a multiracial population, has managed to implement a policy to integrate its people resulting in all races respecting each other and living in harmony.

"We want to have more international contacts with Malaysia in political as well in cultural fields," he said.

Maeda said Japan also wishes to support Malaysia in its contacts with African countries as well as with other Asean countries.

"We are very appreciative of the Look East Policy because after the World War II, Japan was very devastated but we are now in the position to support the international community.

"We appreciate Malaysia's desire get some of our experiences and during the last 20 years we think we have provided a lot to Malaysia and Malaysia has learnt a lot from our side," he said.

UNIVERSITY IN THE MAKING

The proposed establishment of a Japan technological university in Malaysia is also viewed as a means to pave the way for greater cooperation between the two countries under the framework of the LEP.

Maeda said Japan supported this idea and wants it to be a fruitful and sustainable one and the country is hoping to see proper planning for the establishment of that tertiary institution.

Tokyo feels that it is better to give more time to its planning because rushing into things could hamper that hope.

The international university, which would focus on management and technical skills, he said, could initially cater for students from Asean countries before expanding it to Japan, China, Korea.

There had been four to five rounds of discussions on the university at the official level between Japan and Malaysia and Dr Mahathir has expressed the hope that the university becomes a reality in September.

JAPAN'S REGIONAL HOPE

Japan's policy to foster closer relationship with Malaysia and the rest of the Asean member countries is in line with its vision of creating a common community in East Asia and making the region a better place, politically and economically.

With many challenges facing the world now, Japan believes that the East Asian community should work closely to address issues, including counter-terrorism, piracy and human trafficking.

One of the ways that Japan is promoting now is to conclude bilateral agreements on free trade and other fields of cooperation, including human resource development and culture with Asean countries.

Termed as economic partnership agreement (EPA) or the free trade agreement plus (FTA Plus), it has concluded such agreement with Singapore and is now negotiating with Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Against the backdrop of the LEP, the seminar on the 20th anniversary of the policy here made some interesting discourses which reaffirm that the LEP is still relevant to both countries.

Malaysia has also made its position clear that it is not turning away from Japan in this policy, although it is now looking more to Korea and China.

One exciting subject discussed was the Malaysian move to shift its focus to knowledge-based economy.

Yoichi Morishita, Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. Ltd board chairman, said the LEP had contributed greatly to the industrialisation of Malaysia, with its electronic and electric industry accounting for 33 per cent of the output and one-third of its export.

In this regard Malaysia, he cautioned, must maintain some level of industrialisation for its survival in Asia because it could not change into knowledge-based industry overnight.

"So, they have to increase the number of high-skilled workers and software, and at the same time knowledge-based workers have to be trained and fostered," he said.

NUTS AND BOLTS OF POLICY

CEO and Chairman of the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis) Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sophee said the LEP was without any question and without any doubts a success, far beyond the number of students and trainees who had directly obtained their training in Japan.

According to the Director-General of Public Service Malaysia, Tan Sri Jamaluddin Ahmad Damanhuri, Malaysia had sent more than 13,000 students and trainees to Japan to acquire higher education and technical skills at

Japanese public and private institutions in the 20 years.

The LEP was officially announced on Feb 8, 1982, during the fifth Joint Annual Conference of Malaysia-Japan Economic Association (Majeca) and Japan-Malaysia Economic Association (Jameca).

The policy was extended to Korea through a joint statement between Dr Mahathir and President Chun Doo Hwan during the official visit of Dr Mahathir to Korea from Aug 8 to Aug 14, 1983. -- Bernama

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