

**Asean, Japan Need To Shape More Suitable Relationship, Says Muhyiddin
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin today emphasised the need for Asean nations and Japan to shape their future relationship into one more suited to the realities of the 21st century.

He said that if in the past, Japan was Asean's principal partner in economic matters, today the regional economic engagement had expanded to include China, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

"This, too, may change as there is a proposal to reformulate this network of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) under an arrangement to be known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

"All these developments will ultimately have an impact on the status quo. As much as we are happy with the current state of affairs between the two sides, it is time for us to look for new ways to strengthen and deepen these relations," he said in his keynote address at the 38th Asean-Japan Business Meeting, here.

Malaysia-Japan Economic Association (MAJECA) chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim and Japan's Ambassador to Malaysia Shigeru Nakamura were also present at the event.

Muhyiddin suggested that to strengthen Asean-Japan relations, four areas had to be explored.

Firstly, he said, there was a need to promote Japanese investments in high value-added sectors such as green technologies, environmental technologies, bio-technologies and information communication technologies in the Asean countries.

Secondly, measures needed to be taken to double trade and investment volume and conclude the signing of the Asean-Japan investment and Asean-Japan services agreements, he said.

Thirdly, he said, it was necessary to improve Asean-Japan connectivity.

Fourthly, there was a need to create greater awareness of Asean among Japanese small and medium enterprises (SMEs), he said.

On the Asean Economic Community (AEC), Muhyiddin said Asean should not delay implementation of its plan to form an economic community by 2015.

He said the progress of this project was being monitored at the leaders' level.

"In this context, let me reiterate the strong commitment of the Malaysian government to do what is necessary to form the AEC. Our success rate in the implementation of the AEC blueprint measures over 90 per cent," he said.

Meanwhile, Nakamura read out a congratulatory message from Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda who said Japan was determined to further deepen 'kizuna' (friendship) and would continue to expand political and security cooperation to maintain regional peace and stability.

Strengthening the region's economic integration would benefit global economies, Noda said.

"Enhancement of Asean connectivity is an issue that Japan will actively work on together with the private sector. We want to continue to achieve growth together with Asean," he added.

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