

Malaysia, Japan To Elevate Ties To Strategic Partnership

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From Arul Rajoo

TOKYO, May 25 (Bernama) -- Malaysia and its long-standing friend and third largest trading partner, Japan, today agreed to elevate their bilateral relations to the level of "Strategic Partnership".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the ties between both countries had progressed well over the years, and cooperation in various fields like economy, tourism and people-to-people, had grown steadily.

"We have decided to raise the relationship to a Strategic Partnership that we believe can lift the bilateral ties to a greater height," Najib said at a joint-press conference with his counterpart Shinzo Abe after their bilateral meeting at the Prime Minister's Office here.

The Prime Minister, who is here on a three-day official visit beginning Sunday, was earlier accorded an official welcoming ceremony, in which he inspected the ceremonial guard-of-honour from the Self-Defence Forces.

The Malaysian delegation also included Malaysian Ambassador to Japan Datuk Ahmad Izlan Idris, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Idris Jala and Chief Secretary to the Government, Tan Sri Ali Hamsa.

With the new partnership guiding the two countries' journey into the future, Najib said both leaders shared the determination to enhance cooperation, specifically in five areas, namely cooperation for peace and stability; achieving free, open and stable sea; investment through Look East Policy (LEP) 2.0 and economy; expanded cooperation in cultural and people-to-people exchange; and contribution to regional and global agenda.

Najib said Malaysia would ensure the LEP 2.0 would be in line with the country's objective of becoming a high-income nation by 2020.

Meanwhile, Abe said both leaders shared the view that the implementation of cooperation in the areas including advanced industrial technologies, services and managerial skills, should be expedited.

He said Japan would launch the LEP 2.0 Training Programme, a new cost-sharing training programme with the goal of accepting 500 trainees from Malaysia over the next five years.

"I have also told Prime Minister Najib that Japan will support Malaysia as the chair of ASEAN in leading the grouping into integration," he added.

In a joint statement issued after the meeting, both Japan and Malaysia reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peace, stability, security and freedom of navigation in and

over-flight over the South China Sea.

They also underscored the importance for all parties concerned to exercise self-restraint and to settle their maritime disputes and difference through peaceful means.

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