

Kennedy shouldering bigger responsibility to revive Look East Policy

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By Samantha Tan

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 11 (Bernama) – Some 24 years after serving as a junior Malaysian diplomatic officer to Japan, Datuk Kennedy Jawan will return to the ‘Land of the Rising Sun’, this time with a bigger responsibility, especially with the Malaysia-Japan bilateral relations entering into a new wave to achieving a shared vision under the revival of the Look East Policy (LEP).

Kennedy, who was appointed Malaysia's Ambassador-Designate to Japan on Dec 20, was the deputy secretary-general (multilateral affairs) at the Foreign Ministry since January last year.

His first posting to Japan was as the second secretary of the Malaysian Embassy from 1992 to 1995 before getting posted as the first secretary to Myanmar’s Yangon until 1999.

Kennedy has always considered Japan as very close to his heart because the country was his first overseas posting since joining the Foreign Ministry in 1989.

Interestingly, this time the 57-year-old Sarawak-born will spearhead efforts for the LEP 2.0 which is the revival of the first LEP when it was first introduced by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the 1980s after his first appointment as the fourth Malaysian prime minister, and currently he has returned as the seventh prime minister in May last year.

“Looking back, our relations (Malaysia-Japan) have been excellent since the diplomatic ties established in 1957. The LEP was already into its 10th year during my assignment then,” Kennedy told Bernama in an interview at his office in Putrajaya recently.

The first wave was initiated in 1982 when Dr Mahathir was prime minister from 1981 to

2003.

Kennedy had also previously served as Assistant Secretary (Americas) from 1989 until 1992, and later returned to Malaysia and served as Principal Assistant Secretary (South Asia) from 1999 until 2002.

He had also served as counsellor at the Embassy of Malaysia in the United States (US) from 2002 until 2005, Principal Assistant Secretary (East Asia) from 2005 until 2007 and Undersecretary of Finance and Development Division from 2007 until 2008.

Later, he was appointed Malaysia's high commissioner to South Africa from 2008 until 2014, ambassador to Spain from 2014 until 2016, and undersecretary of Americas Division in early 2017.

Acknowledging the challenges ahead, Kennedy said the revival of LEP had sparked a new interest among Japanese investors and that it would be a busy post (ambassador) for him.

He said he had met with the Japanese Ambassador to Malaysia, Dr Makio Miyagawa for exchanges and discussion on some areas including the establishment of Japanese universities in Malaysia and also how Japan could assist Malaysia in economy with its Samurai bond.

The LEP, he added, was implemented not only to look at Japan's progress in various aspects and emulate their successful developments, but could also be a platform to strengthen cooperation in political, economic and people-to-people connectivity.

"Of course from my angle, probably looking at different perspectives – political, economy and people-to-people contact in terms of social and cultural aspects. I think from the political side of it, we are very close since the prime minister (Dr Mahathir) often visits and of course from the Japanese side, I will try to encourage more incoming visits to Malaysia from Japan.

“These, I believe, will pave the way for greater exchanges between the two countries in terms of creating a better and greater awareness. It is not that we do not know each other, but to enhance awareness even much better.”

On the economic aspects, Kennedy said the focus was to promote greater exchanges within the private sector, and encourage more inward investments from Japan to Malaysia to facilitate Malaysia’s efforts to becoming a developed nation by 2025.

“Also, to facilitate cooperation in the financial sector considering that Malaysia has agreed with the issuance of the Samurai Bond at the Tokyo market. Malaysia is also considering the offer made by Japan on the Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan to drive the national development,” he added.

To foster cooperation in the transportation sector, Kennedy said Japan had agreed to assist Malaysia with a comprehensive study on the transportation system, including the improvement of the Johor Baharu-Padang Besar electrification and double tracking rail system and inter-city transportation system, expansion of Port Klang as well as increasing capacities on the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Penang airports.

On the social aspects, he said the people-to-people connectivity had always been important to create greater strength between the two countries, therefore his focus would be in promoting exchanges of visits among university and school students, cultural activities and digital interactions such as e-games and animation pop culture.

He said it was also crucial for vocational and skills training collaboration as science and technology were definitely Malaysia’s foci in its pursuit to achieve a developed nation.

“Hence, I anticipate that our cooperation in this sector will thrive in the upcoming years. Our Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change, along with the relevant agencies are looking into specific cooperation, for instance, in weather forecast,

human capability development for nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear security, among others.

“We should also emulate the Japanese urban planning where despite the rigorous manufacturing sector, Japan has managed to ensure its Air Quality Index remains low,” he noted.

Kennedy also said that promoting education to boost people-to-people contact would also be one of his tasks by way of encouraging Japanese universities to open their branch campuses in Malaysia.

Currently, three Japanese institutions have conveyed their interest to set their footholds in Malaysia, namely Tsukuba University, one of the oldest and most comprehensive research universities in Japan, Nippon Designer School and Ritsumeikan University.

In Japan this time, Kennedy will have opportunities to among others, witness several important and historic events, including Japan’s Emperor Akihito abdication in April this year, becoming the nation’s first abdication in 200 years, and enthronement ceremony scheduled from Oct 22 to 23 to mark Crown Prince Naruhito's ascension.

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