

Malaysia-Japan ties will soar to new level with Look East Policy 2.0

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PUTRAJAYA, Jan 18 (Bernama) – Malaysia-Japan relations, which saw tremendous progress since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1957, will be elevated to a new level, with the Look East Policy (LEP) 2.0 paving the way to a vast range of opportunities, says Malaysia's Ambassador-Designate to Japan, Datuk Kennedy Jawan

He said both governments were set to play a crucial role in ensuring that efforts under LEP 2.0 bore fruit.

“The LEP 2.0 will continue to enhance institutional cooperation in training and education, with greater economic focus on elevating trade and investment potential in priority areas between Malaysia and Japan,” he recently told Bernama International News Service in an interview at his office in Putrajaya, Malaysia's federal administrative capital.

Kennedy said the initial LEP, mooted in 1982 continued to be one of the best policies that the country benefited from, and remained relevant, having expanded over the years as the country progressed and Japan continued to be a leader in many manufacturing and engineering sectors.

LEP, the brainchild of Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was anchored with the aim of emulating Japan's success in transforming the nation into a high-tech industrial value chain in various sectors, particularly in manufacturing.

Due to the LEP's success, the policy's scope was diversified and expanded to include other new peripheries which led to the new wave of LEP 2.0.

Japan is a key trading partner for Malaysia. It is Malaysia's fourth largest trading partner,

while for Japan, Malaysia is its 11th largest trading partner in the world, and fourth among ASEAN countries after Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

Kennedy pointed out that the LEP 2.0 should be viewed from a broader perspective as this initiative not only created opportunities while boosting investments, but also shared and exchanged know-how and expertise which would expedite Malaysia's adoption in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0).

Therefore, he said, three potentials which would be highlighted under the LEP 2.0 were the halal industry, education and tourism which would further strengthen people-to-people connectivity.

In the halal sector, he believed Malaysian investors and companies should take advantage of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Halal Cooperation, signed between Malaysia and Japan at the end of last year.

This, he said, would open markets for Malaysia to promote its local halal products and services.

"Looking ahead with the hosting of the Osaka Rugby World Cup this year, Tokyo Olympics in 2020 and Osaka World Expo 2025, these events present opportunities for Malaysian companies to showcase, promote and supply their products and services in Japan, as well as the international community," said the 57-year-old Sarawak-born diplomat.

Kennedy said Malaysia could provide assistance and share its experiences and expertise in halal development with Japan, not only in food and beverage industry or services but also in the tourism-related industry.

On the Industry 4.0, he said Malaysia looked forward to collaborate with Japan to create a conducive investment environment that would encourage and support more companies in Malaysia to innovate and adopt the strategy in their business processes.

The ambassador-designate said Malaysia aspired to generate sustainable and inclusive growth by transforming the nation to fully prepare for the Industry 4.0 under the country's National Policy on Industry 4.0.

To this, he noted, it would create an environment to encourage investments in automation and information technology.

“Some of the potential sectors that Malaysian companies should focus in tapping the Japanese market and vice-versa are aerospace, halal foods and services, technology related to renewable energy, healthcare and welfare-related services and products, as well as creative, multimedia and content products and services,” he explained.

Under LEP 2.0, Malaysia hopes to facilitate the adoption of the Industry 4.0 in a systematic and comprehensive manner, driven by its own tech-savvy workforce under the training, education and adaption of the Japanese working culture and good ethics.

In terms of investment from Japan, Kennedy said Malaysia wished to place itself as Japan's strategic partner for smart manufacturing, high technology industries and solution provider for manufacturing in the sectors of, among others, electrical and electronics, medical devices, machinery and equipment, chemicals as well as aerospace.

“We have the infrastructure to cater to these industries. Malaysia is also cooperating with existing Japanese companies in Malaysia, for example, Sony, Panasonic, Konica Minolta, Daihatsu, Sharp, Hitachi and Sumitomo, which have already adopted Industry 4.0 in Japan, to further extend the application to their manufacturing bases and supply chain in Malaysia,” he noted.

Furthermore, Malaysia's impressive performance in the World Bank's Doing Business 2019 Report, which saw its ranking advance nine places to 15th spot in 2018 from 24th in the previous year among 190 economies worldwide, will further provide confidence and

renewed interest from the Japanese.

On people-to-people contacts, Kennedy said the tourism industry had proven to be the most effective tool.

Therefore, he added, Malaysia should be focusing more on tourism promotion in order to boost the industry, thus further enhancing people-to-people exchanges with not only Japan but also other countries worldwide.

“Malaysia could also enhance people-to-people exchanges through education, particularly under the training programmes involving government officials, manufacturing workers as well as language teachers.

“In Japan, I will make it a point to promote Malaysia’s arts, culture and foods in schools, universities and in other suburban prefectures,” he said.

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