

Malaysia independence day

Developed nation by 2020 is the goal

Datuk Shaharuddin Md. Som
AMBASSADOR OF MALAYSIA

On the occasion of the 53rd anniversary of the independence of Malaysia, I have the great honor to convey my heartfelt greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, the Imperial Family, the government and the people of Japan. I would also like to extend my warm greetings to all Malaysians, friends of Malaysia and readers of The Japan Times.



On this day, Malaysians everywhere celebrate "Hari Merdeka" to commemorate the birth of the Federation of Malaysia 53 years ago. Hari Merdeka should serve as a day for Malaysians to reflect upon the nation's past achievements and renew our collective sense of purpose required to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak, several initiatives were introduced by the government

aimed at transforming Malaysia into a high-income economy as part of the road map to attain developed nation status by 2020. The New Economic Model (NEM), which was launched on March 30, is the framework to bring Malaysia into the realm of a high-income economy from its present middle-income status by increasing its per capita income to \$15,000 by 2015 from the current \$7,000, as well as maintaining a growth target of 6 percent. In complementing the NEM, the prime minister also launched the Government Transformation Program (GTP), which focuses on streamlining and adapting government procedures with a view to enhancing the overall business climate in Malaysia and elevating transparency. Meanwhile, the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) underscores the country's five-year development plan in complementing the NEM and focuses on improving key areas such as education, health care, labor and public infrastructure.

The NEM also stresses Malaysia's aspiration to achieve a sustainable and balanced growth. Toward this end, the

government is promoting green technology to become an important sector in the nation's economic development and a new source of growth through various programs and incentives. One such program is the establishment of the Green Technology Financing Scheme (GTFS), which provides entrepreneurs and organizations (producers and users of green technology) with soft loans. The government is also working toward the development of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya to be green townships, leading the way for other cities to be similarly developed. The government is also developing an eco-labeling program to conform to international standards and regulations. This program will also facilitate the implementation of green procurement in the government sector.

In fulfilling the ambition of transforming itself from a middle-income country into a high-income economy by 2020, Malaysia is undertaking practical steps to make this a reality. Malaysia is already home to more than 5,000 foreign companies from more than 40 countries. In 2009, Japan was the largest foreign investor with a total investment of \$2.1 billion. Under the Third Industrial Master Plan (2006/2020) Malaysia is promoting high-technology, capital-intensive, resource-based and high value-added sectors such as advanced electronics, pharmaceuticals, alternative energy, machinery and equipment, petrochemicals, biotechnology, photonics and nanotechnology. Malaysia is also building on its natural resources and position as a leading supplier of palm oil, rubber and wood as well as the flora used in herbal medicines and pharmaceuticals.

Following the government's

announcement of the liberalization of 27 service sectors, including health, tourism and transport, as well as liberalization of fund management and stock brokering, Malaysia is looking even more attractive for foreign investors, especially with the incentives offered to match these liberalization measures. As an Islamic nation, Malaysia is also establishing a reputation for halal products and Islamic finance.

Investors report that political stability since independence has contributed to the probusiness and investor-friendly climate that now exists in Malaysia. Add to the mix the attractive tax incentives and intellectual property protection that the Malaysian government is introducing, it is no surprise that Malaysia has achieved a respectable position in the rankings of locations considered good for business. Malaysia was ranked No. 1 for investor protection by the 2009 Forbes Report, while the 2009 AT Kearney Global Services Location Index rated the country as the third-most attractive outsourcing location. Malaysia was also ranked the 10th-most competitive country in the world by the Institute of Management Development's 2010 World Competitiveness Yearbook and it moved up four places to rank 20th out of a total of 181 economies surveyed in the World Bank Doing Business 2009 report.

In the tourism sector, the government continues to promote Malaysia as the ideal destination for holidays, especially in ecotourism, golfing and home-stay programs where tourists can experience a typical Malaysian village lifestyle. Despite 2009 being a challenging year due to various crises such as the economic slowdown and influenza A



Investment: Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohamed Najib Tun Abdul Razak speaks at a meeting with Japanese business leaders in Tokyo on April 20. BERNAMA/MALAYSIAN NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY

(H1N1), Malaysia has successfully attracted 23.65 million tourists with a 7.2 percent increase in tourist arrivals. With a total of 395,746 tourist arrivals from Japan in 2009, Malaysia hopes to attract more Japanese tourists to Malaysia in 2010 especially in programs that appeal most to Japanese tourists, such as the home-stay program and the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) program.

The tourism industry in Malaysia currently ranks as the No. 2 foreign exchange earner. As far as the results go, promoting its tourism industry has been one of the country's success stories. In celebrating Malaysia's 53 years of nationhood, its tourism industry certainly deserves due recognition for its contributions to the nation in terms of income generation, infrastructure development and job creation.

Malaysia is fortunate to have been blessed with numerous assets and attractions

to suit the taste and preference of every visitor. Nature lovers will be mesmerized by the country's 130 million-year-old rain forests, exotic marine parks, as well as rich biodiversity and ecosystems. Malaysia is also proud to have some of its destinations listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely the Gunung Mulu National Park, Kinabalu Park, and the historical sites of Georgetown and Melaka. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) barometer, Malaysia made it into the top 10 countries with the highest international tourist arrivals for 2009. Malaysia secured the ninth position, up two notches from the previous year.

Bilateral relations between Malaysia and Japan reached new heights with the first official visit to Japan by Prime Minister Najib in April 2010. A meeting between Najib and Yukio Hatoyama, the then prime minister, resulted in the issuance of a Joint Leaders'

Statement reaffirming the commitments of both countries to further strengthen their partnership. Najib also had a round-table meeting with Japanese captains of industry to further garner their interest to invest and conduct business in Malaysia.

Drawing from Japan's contribution to Malaysia's economic development over the last 50 years, Malaysia welcomes Japan's continued participation in Malaysia's pursuit toward becoming a developed country by 2020. Malaysia also looks to Japan for cooperation in meeting today's transnational challenges, namely developing clean energy partnerships, confronting climate change and curbing infectious diseases. During the official visit, the two leaders also confirmed the Japan-Malaysia Cooperation Initiative for Environment and Energy to further advance cooperation in the two areas.

Bilateral trade between

Malaysia and Japan have always been robust and continuously expanding over the years. Despite the global financial crisis in 2009, Malaysia's bilateral trade with Japan amounted to \$30.9 billion with the balance of trade in Malaysia's favor at \$100 million. Japan was the fourth-largest global trading partner for Malaysia in 2009.

There have also been achievements in youth exchanges under the Japan-East Asia Network for Students and Youth (JENESYS) Program, which has allowed people-to-people exchanges at all levels.

On this special occasion, I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to The Japan Times for giving me the opportunity to address its esteemed readers, who have contributed to the promotion of the ties of friendship and cooperation between Malaysia and Japan. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the sponsors for their generous contributions.



Historic: Malacca, located in the south of the Peninsula of Malaysia, is listed as a World Heritage site. TOURISM MALAYSIA



Scenic: On the island of Borneo, Mulu National Park, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, encompasses caves and karst formations in a mountainous rain forest. TOURISM MALAYSIA

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