

Malaysia independence day

The Look East Policy at 30, pillar of bilateral relations

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AMBASSADOR OF MALAYSIA

Aug. 31 marks the 55th anniversary of the independence of Malaysia. On this auspicious occasion, 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 friendly people of Japan. I would also like to extend my warm greetings to all Malaysians, friends of Malaysia and readers of The Japan Times.

This year's Hari Merdeka, which all Malaysians celebrate today to commemorate the independence of the then Malaya in 1957, also coincides not only with the 55th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Japan but also the 30th anniversary of Malaysia's Look East Policy.

The Look East Policy (LEP) was introduced by the then Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on Feb. 8, 1982. The formulation of the LEP was inspired by Japan's past struggle for success, particularly its resilience and determination in rising from the ashes of World War II to become one of the most powerful global economies. The policy calls on Malaysians to look toward Japan and other rapidly developing eastern nations for inspiration, methods and skills in our attempt to further develop Malaysia. Through the policy, Malaysia aims to emulate and learn from Japan, among others, the technological knowhow, work ethic and good work values, and management system that have been the ingredients for the success of Japan.

Now after more than 30 years following the introduction of the LEP, Malaysia has certainly ben-



Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak of Malaysia

efited from the policy. Malaysia has positioned itself among the world's fast-growing economies and is moving toward developed nation status by 2020. The LEP has without doubt brought the desired results and has accelerated Malaysia's development through providing the right kind of workforce for increased foreign investment, technology transfer and in-house training. Japanese technology, gained through the implementation of various cooperative projects between our two nations in the ambit of the LEP, have continued to facilitate industrial development in Malaysia. At the same time, Japanese institutions of higher learning have also assisted in the training of our human resources. To date, more than 15,000 Malaysians have obtained their tertiary education as well as benefited from the various advanced trainings under the policy.

The implementation of the LEP reached another milestone in 2011 when both the governments of Malaysia and Japan formally agreed to establish and jointly finance the development

of the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIT) in Kuala Lumpur. The establishment of the MJIT, which was officially declared open by both Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak and former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama on June 1, 2012, is indeed a fitting testament to the successes achieved in training, higher education and capacity building, the result of close cooperation between Malaysia and Japan throughout the implementation of the LEP in the last three decades. We certainly hope that MJIT will become a permanent monument and symbol of the close and strong bilateral ties between Putrajaya and Tokyo, particularly in the field of training and higher education.

Without doubt, the LEP has indeed been the foundation behind Malaysia's excellent relations with Japan and the East Asian region. Over the years Malaysia and Japan have endured a relationship predicated upon a common and mutual worldview that has withstood the test of time. The relationship at the leaders' level continues to be excellent as manifested from the regular exchange of visits at the ministerial and senior officials' level, including the visit of Prime Minister Najib to Tokyo on May 25-26, 2011, to deliver a keynote address at the 17th Nikkei Conference on The Future of Asia, as well as the official visit of Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba to Malaysia on Oct. 13, 2011, and the visit of Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Sri Anifah Aman to Tokyo on April 24-25, 2012. This active exchange of visits has certainly forged a close working relationship between the two governments.

The implementation of the LEP since the last three decades has also improved positively on trade and investment, education and human resource develop-



Leading cities: About 25 km south of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya has served as the administrative center since 1999, while Kuala Lumpur (right) is where Parliament meets and is the cultural, financial and economic center of Malaysia. TOURISM MALAYSIA

ment, capacity building, science and technology, cultural exchanges as well as tourism. Bilateral trade between Malaysia and Japan for the past five years has recorded continued growth, with the exception in 2009 due to the global economic and financial situation. Exports especially have been trending upward since the implementation of the Malaysia-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (MJEPA) in 2006. For 2011, overall trade with Japan amounted to \$49.27 billion, which is a 22.05 percent increase compared to the previous year. This comprised exports to Japan valued at \$30.483 billion and imports from Japan worth \$18.787 billion, making Japan the third largest trading partner of Malaysia for 2011. As regards investment, Japan was the largest source of foreign investments in 2011, with approved investments of \$3.36 billion in 77 projects. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March last year, which has affected the tourism industry, tourist arrivals

from Japan in 2011 were relatively encouraging with 380,675 arrivals. This figure, which constitute only a 7 percent drop from the 415,811 arrivals in 2010, is definitely a decent achievement when compared to the anticipated drop of 30 percent that was initially forecast following the triple disasters.

Malaysia remains committed and convinced of the importance and relevancy of the LEP in further strengthening its close ties with Japan. The calmness, courage and perseverance of the Japanese people in dealing with the tragedy brought by the Great East Japan Earthquake and their patience and strong determination in the ongoing efforts toward the rebuilding of the nation as well as the revitalization of its economy, has certainly won the admiration of Malaysians and the entire nation. It is with this conviction that we believe Japan can continue to play a pivotal role in facilitating Malaysia's transformation from an industrial economy to an in-



novation economy as it did previously in Malaysia's first transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Malaysia shares the belief that it is now perhaps timely for both our nations to revisit the Look East Policy by introducing new and innovative fields or areas where Japan can share its expertise as well as where both nations could collaborate in elevating our existing relationships toward new heights. For as much as Malaysia can learn from Japan's strength in terms of science and technological advancement, Japan can also gain from Malaysia's diverse expertise in Islamic finance, tropical medicine, oceanography, forestry and multicultural engagement.

Today, as Malaysia celebrates its 55 years of independence, Malaysians all over the world should reflect upon the nation's past achievements and renew our collective sense of purpose required to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Since independence more than five decades

ago and as a nation characterized by diversity, Malaysia has indeed achieved remarkable success. Malaysians everywhere should feel proud that their country has achieved tremendous economic and social progress in an environment of peace, prosperity and inter-racial as well as inter-religious harmony. Malaysia can indeed be full of pride today because we have demonstrated that with political stability, and economic development and the right leadership, we have prevailed in the face of many challenges, overcome many barriers and achieved success. From its beginning as a low-income agrarian nation dependent on rubber and tin, Malaysia has successfully emerged as a moderately high-income, modern industrial nation with strong economic fundamentals.

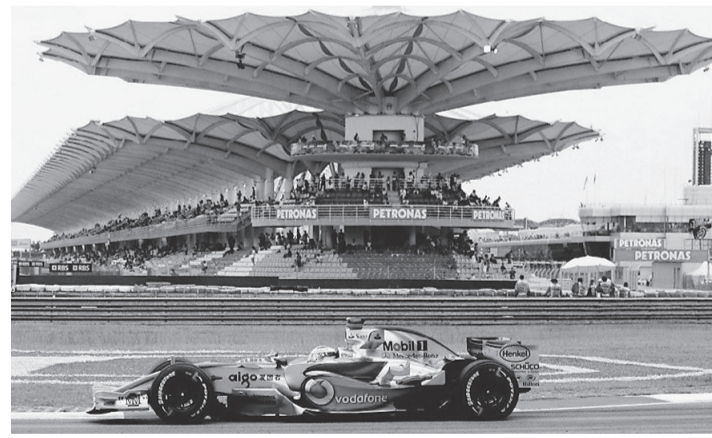
All these achievements were made possible by a visionary government and leadership committed to serving the people. The unwavering public support from all Malaysians since inde-

pendence has also contributed to the success of Malaysia. In this respect, we are greatly indebted to the past leadership and previous generations because their great efforts and sacrifices have provided us with a strong foundation, from which we can build on in the future. This developmental journey has spanned from the five former prime ministers, beginning from the first prime minister and father of independence, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, the late Tun Abdul Razak Dato' Hussein, the late Tun Hussein Dato' Onn, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to the current Prime Minister Najib.

Finally, 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 thanks to the sponsors for their generous contributions.



Tourist draws: Mount Kinabalu in Sabah is the highest peak in Southeast Asia while the Sepang International Circuit (below) is a world-class facility, a center of motor sports development and host to a Formula One Grand Prix. TOURISM MALAYSIA



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