

JICA and ASEAN: Ready for the Challenges Ahead

JICA President Akihiko Tanaka

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gions where we work, and our approach must be comprehensive. We provide encouragement to the middle-income countries to resolve challenges that they are facing, at the same time paying attention to the needs of the countries working to get out of least-developed status and to the issues of human security.

As the region prepares to create the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, Japan's efforts should be aligned with ASEAN's vision of community building. One pillar of this is "ASEAN connectivity"—in the physical sense as well as the "soft" side of people-to-people connections.

Southeast Asia is both a showcase for JICA activities and an experimental laboratory to try innovative approaches. Our efforts in Myanmar, for example, are increasingly based on our successful efforts in other countries. This year saw the launch of a project in Thailand to face the challenges of an aging society. Following successful development, some Asian countries are facing a situation similar to that in Japan and Korea. For Thailand to go beyond the middle-income stage and achieve more harmonious societal

development, joint Thai-Japanese efforts may be useful, while also providing lessons for Japan to apply at home.

Building "Heart-to-Heart" Ties

Japan has a lengthy history of relations with ASEAN, and today our ties with the region are sound, dynamic, and thriving. When Japan first became a partner to ASEAN in 1973, however, this was not necessarily the case. One year later, Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited Jakarta and Bangkok, only to be confronted by anti-Japanese demonstrations that shocked Japan. In 1977, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda expressed Japan's determination to become a more cooperative partner with ASEAN, increasing its economic assistance as well as its human exchange through relations based on "heart-to-heart understanding."

Our shared experiences since then have been very positive for both sides. Today Malaysia and Thailand are joining the ranks of middle-income countries, and Indonesia and the Philippines are also seeing strong economic growth. At the same time, though, Laos and Cambodia have yet to overcome the challenge of poverty reduction, and with its recent democratization, Myanmar faces many developmental issues. JICA's activities in the region must be adaptable to this diversity. Some of our experiences with the older ASEAN members can be useful in the development of the newer members.

A Region of Diverse Challenges

The JICA approach to ASEAN is well suited to differences. Southeast Asia continues to be one of the most important re-

A Springboard for Global Development

Based on our experience here, we can expand our activities throughout Southeast Asia, to the Middle East, and to Africa. And many successful ASEAN countries are themselves extending cooperative activities elsewhere. JICA is energized by its work with these emerging donors in international cooperation within the region and around the globe.

The development of Southeast Asia, an economic hub connecting and integrating the Pacific and Indian Oceans, is deeply related to Japan's national interest. As a comprehensive development institution, what JICA can do is to reduce bottlenecks that could hinder sound development in these regions. In this connection, we have many new areas of cooperation between Japan and Southeast Asia thanks to the robust human connections cultivated over our decades of partnership.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of relations between Japan and ASEAN, and next year is the 60th since Japan began its cooperation with the region. And in 2015 ASEAN will form its economic community. Milestones are useful junctures to reflect on past achievements and to reconfirm the challenges ahead. But international cooperation is a continuous effort. JICA is committed to refining its approaches and pursuing improvements in support for ASEAN—and thus the world.

A Strong History to Build On

ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh



A Partnership with Room to Grow

Since the establishment of informal dialogue relations four decades ago in 1973, cooperation between ASEAN and Japan has broadened and deepened, covering political and security, economic and financial, and social and cultural areas.

In addition to continuing to support efforts to narrow the development gaps in ASEAN and the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, I believe both ASEAN and Japan could cooperate in addressing a range of transnational issues such as environmental degradation, maritime safety and piracy, drug trafficking, infectious diseases, and terrorism, as well as examining other areas for cooperation such as transport infrastructure, customs procedures, and road regulations.

Support in All Sectors

Southeast Asia has historical and growing links with both South Asia and East Asia. ASEAN established a number of mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum, where countries of South Asia and East Asia interact, dialogue, and cooperate. Besides the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to be established with ASEAN continuing to play a central role will also contribute to linking the countries of the two regions.

JICA's continued assistance to ASEAN through several projects, such as supporting the ASEAN University Network/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net) and completing the Feasibility Study on the Establishment of an ASEAN Roll-on/Roll-off

(RoRo) Shipping Network and Short Sea Shipping, is much appreciated.

Looking Forward to Milestones— and Beyond

The 40th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Dialogue Relations this year is an opportunity for us to explore ways to enhance our longstanding ties and to expand our partnership in the coming decades. I look forward to the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit this December, when the Leaders of ASEAN and Japan will meet in Tokyo to discuss a mid- to long-term vision for our relationship. We should convey the message that ASEAN is committed to continuing to work with Japan in realizing the full potential of our ties towards greater progress and development in the region.

During my term of office, ASEAN will reach two important milestones. By 2015 the ASEAN Community is to be established, and in 2017, ASEAN will celebrate 50 years of its existence. The ASEAN Community 2015 building efforts are on track and we are strategizing for the years beyond. As Secretary-General of ASEAN, I am entrusted with the demanding task of seeing through the implementation of ASEAN agreements and decisions, as well as reporting on ASEAN's work to the region's Leaders to assist them in sustaining their vision and aspirations for the community.

In discharging that mandate in the next five years, my highest priorities will be getting the Community established, laying a firm basis for ASEAN's continued and enhanced integration, maintaining ASEAN's centrality, strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat, and securing external support for these objectives.

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